





A STUDY IN ILLUMINATION

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# A STUDY IN ILLUMINATION

BY

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“Loquere, Dómine, quia audit servus tuus. Non loquatur mihi Moyses aut aliquis ex prophetis: sed tu potius loquere, Dómine Deus, inspirator et illuminator omnium prophetarum; quia tu solus sine iis potes me perfecte imbuere; illi autem sine te nihil proficient.”—DE IMITATIONE CHRISTI, III., II.

## FOREWORD

A GREAT part of Chapter IV appeared in *The Seeker* for February, 1913, under the title "Robert Browning as a Mystic." Though the fact will be apparent to careful readers, yet, in order to forestall and save superficial criticism, it may be as well to say that the many quotations are *illustrations* of the theory of the book; that their function is precisely that of diagrams, say in a treatise on entomology. As it would be tiresome to one reader to have to go to his collection every time he wished to see an insect, so it would be to another to walk across the room to his book-shelves. Moreover, it might conceivably happen in both cases that the particular specimen was not there.

I owe and offer thanks to those who have generously permitted me to make any excerpts from their copyright works, whether to author or publisher; most specially to the Right Rev. Lady

Abbess of Stanbrook Abbey, in the case of S. Teresa, and to Mr Thomas Baker; and to Wilfred Meynell, Esq., and Messrs Burns & Oates, in the case of Francis Thompson.

G. E. H.

FEAST OF S. DUNSTAN, 1914.



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# A STUDY IN ILLUMINATION

## PROLOGUE

It is the fashion in a modern and powerful section of that world which interests itself in psychology, to urge that the senses are the only channels of human knowledge. Knowledge is, however, an equivocal word. It could bear a meaning which would allow all of us to concede this point. Unfortunately, some psychologists seem to set no bounds to its connotation, or if they do, do not make the limits obvious. To maintain this predominant importance of the senses is not only modern; *nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu* is Scholasticism's ancient formula; and the Abbot of Buckfast endorses it with the sweeping judgment, "There is not one single exception."<sup>1</sup> But then the Schoolmen reckoned intellect as having a partial

<sup>1</sup> "The Human Soul," page 31. By Anscar Vonier, O.S.B.

value, and did not forget man's spirit, and its exalted functions. "We know nothing but by outward signification,"<sup>1</sup> wrote Sir Thomas Elyot in 1531; and that clinching sentence probably bears the same absolute and materialistic meaning as the dictum of a living philosopher, who wrote, "All mental activity is based upon the results of sense-perception, with which it starts."<sup>2</sup>

The ordinary thinker might possibly suppose that it is the business of the psychologist to consider every possible type of mental life, and to weigh every actual human capacity; might fancy that he of all men, to use Voltaire's phrase to De Vauvenargues, is entitled to preferences (perhaps) but to no exclusions; and if such an ordinary mortal should so reflect, he might find himself proceeding to inquire, "What has the psychologist done with the saints?" For while there are "practical" saints, i.e. those who heal men's bodies, satisfy their hunger and other physical needs, teach their ignorance, and succour them, in various more or less "sensible" ways, there are also the Contemplatives, the Ecstatics. What of their way of knowledge? What of the methods of that comparatively large body of men and women who are known as the Mystics? The time has passed when they can be quietly and effectively shovelled out of the way as undiagnosed epileptics, or misty-minded, irrational sentimentalists. To deal thus with

<sup>1</sup> "Boke of the Governour," chapter ii.

<sup>2</sup> "Essentials of Method," section 1. By Professor C. de Garmo.

obstinate facts contrary to one's own standpoint and theory may sometimes seem a short and easy way; but the method has one signal flaw, its total lack of finality; supreme *revenants* are the Saints and Mystics. Above the engrossing materialism of the day, behind the crude and vulgar triumphs of machine-made comfort they stand—challenging, provocative, evocative, ungainsayable. What of the Mystics' path to reality?

Before attempting to answer the question, it is well to be explicit about the word. (There is a present-day mysticism which appears to wish to obliterate the distinction between subject and object.) It escapes in the two writers who prefaced remarks to a reprint of some of William Law's mystical writings. There, Dr du Bose writes: "Mysticism is supposed to involve a direct or immediate communication to the receptive soul of a reality outside of and above the possibility of mere sensible experience. As the heavens are reflected and repeated in the answering depths of a placid lake, so the Heaven of God is mirrored in the responsive soul of man. For one, that is not my mysticism; that is not the way reality comes to me. It comes to me all out of the fathomless depths of myself."<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to the same book, William Scott Palmer says of Law: "He is for ever insisting upon the fact from which men are for ever trying to escape, the fact that in matters of religion only

<sup>1</sup> "Liberal and Mystical Writings of William Law," preface, page viii.

those things which happen *in* happen *for* him. A Christ that is not in him cannot be for him."<sup>1</sup> Now, is not this use of "in" really a juggling with words? An earthquake happens "for" us, but not in us. A loaf of bread is "for" us; thus, if it be outside of us, otherwise if it be in; but "for" us in a sense in both cases. [Surely what Mr Scott Palmer means is that nothing has significance for us which is not capable of coming into relation with us, coming to be *in* us spiritually, intellectually, or physically?] That is an intelligible, even the usual, doctrine; but it is permissible to say that the phrase: "A Christ that is not in him cannot be for him" is either too vague to have value, or, if it be taken at its face-meaning, is simply a heresy. [In this present book, the ancient Catholic doctrine of subjective and objective is accepted, the doctrine of GOD as above, beyond, outside His creatures, yet Who can become known to and be felt and worshipped by them; or, to use popular terms, a transcendent GOD Who deigns also to become immanent.] "Objective truth is one thing, its appreciation in the subject is another. Truth is in the mind," says S. Thomas. "Two worlds exist fitted for each other."<sup>2</sup> And similarly, here, mysticism is taken to mean that direct knowledge of something not the "knower," as contrasted with the indirect knowledge he gains

<sup>1</sup> "Liberal and Mystical Writings of William Law," introduction, page 5.

<sup>2</sup> "The Summa Theologica," vol. i., page 14. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

from his senses, and from his reason working over and working up the data of sense.

To return to the question, what of the mystical way? Most writers speak of stages in it, three stages indeed—(purgation, illumination, and union.)

Like all other efforts to draw in human affairs definite, demarcating lines, to set rigid irrevocable limits (the mystical life does not really admit of these absolutely clear-cut severings.) In one sense it may be argued that illumination does and must come first. A careful study of many cases will probably show that here, as elsewhere, there are several aspects of the matter. But sometimes at least, possibly most frequently, very vividly and with sudden onset, the conviction of the supreme reality or supreme worth of an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent life, beyond, around, outside its own small fleeting self, flashes in upon a human soul:

“Hast never come to thee an hour,  
A sudden gleam divine, precipitating, bursting all  
these bubbles, fashions, wealth,  
These eager business aims—books, politics, art,  
amours,  
To utter nothingness?”

Or, the process may be more gradual—a slow breaking-in of light, like that pale gleaming dawn which illumines the sky on some cloudy morning, as the rising sun frets into bars and fringes the dun-coloured east. Whether it be slow like this, or a swift flash out of the dark, a conviction, the equivalent in the mind or soul of

“Leaves of Grass,” page 218. By Walt Whitman.

sudden physical light in the material world, when :

— “ Les chats-huants s'éveillent, et sans bruit,  
Rament l'air noir avec leurs ailes lourdes,  
Et le zénith s'emplit de lueurs sourdes.  
Blanche, Vénus émerge——”<sup>1</sup>

(that conviction is the starting-point of mystic life.) For, after all, the soul needs some stimulus, some light of a far-away hope; it cannot embark on a quest from mere vacuity; it must be aware or at least dream of something; it will never set out on an empty search nor seek an absolutely hidden goal. Just because, very often at least, the instant of illumination is actually aflame with the glow from the pure sight, the dark and sin-stained soul is there and then aware of its own sordid unworthiness. For the American psychologist seems to be writing against the evidence when he insists so hardily that, in the moment of illumination: “It is not that the person escapes from sin, but he no longer sees that there is any sin in the world from which to escape.”<sup>2</sup> This statement is directly traversed by an instance of illumination which this philosopher himself reckons among the “great cases” of the illuminated, that of the Apostle of the Gentiles, S. Paul:

“As he journeyed, he came near to Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul,

<sup>1</sup> “L'heure du berger.” By Paul Verlaine.

<sup>2</sup> “Cosmic Consciousness,” page 62. By R. M. Bucke.



why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am JESUS, Whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? ”<sup>1</sup>

Referring to this, S. Paul himself wrote: “I thank Christ JESUS our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor and injurious: but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”<sup>2</sup> But S. Paul was by no means delivered from the “sense of sin” in himself or in the world. Who can forget his pathetic regret: “The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not that I do . . . O wretched man that I am ”;<sup>3</sup> or his plangent cry, the terror of every genuine teacher—“Lest that by any means, when I have preached unto others, I myself should be a castaway? ”<sup>4</sup>

A signal instance, to a similar effect, may be found in Blaise Pascal. In that strange “Amulet,” casually felt within the doubklet, which clothed his corpse, by a servant who thereupon ripped open the garment and found the precious paper, lies the record of Pascal’s illumination. (It testifies to the “light” which at any rate often accompanies illumination;) it

<sup>1</sup> Acts of the Apostles ix. 3-6.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy i. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Romans vii. 19, 24.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians ix. 27.



on his entering the room through which the prison was approached, the light vanished. The prior, however, entered the cell, and finding it dark, opened the lantern with which he had provided himself, and asked the prisoner who had given him light. S. John answered him and said that no one in the house had done so, that no one could do it, and that there was neither candle nor lamp in the cell. The prior made no reply and went away, thinking that the gaoler had made a mistake. . . ."

While making his escape from the prison of the monastery, it is said that he had a repetition of the experience as follows:

"He saw a wonderful light out of which came a voice: Follow Me. He followed and the light moved before him towards the wall which was on the bank, and then, he knew not how, he found himself on the summit of it without effort or fatigue. He descended into the street, and then the light vanished. So brilliant was it, that for two or three days afterwards, so he confessed at a later time, his eyes were weak as if he had been looking at the sun in its strength."

It cannot be maintained surely that S. Paul, Blaise Pascal, or S. John of the Cross were "without the sense of sin."

In time, the first radiance of that unforgettable moment of illumination passes into memory; and all life turns slowly to the dire task of purgation. (Relentlessly, wearily, with countless slips and repeated failures, the work of uprooting, changing, cleansing goes on.

When, at length, the soul has sloughed its earthly cares, has torn off and thrown away its material fetters, when it goes forth from its own lower self, stripped, detached, emptied, then comes the light for the second time, not now as a transient awakening flash, but as a steady effulgence; and it is this advent—really a return—which is generally known as illumination. Not yet, however, for the real soldier in the fighting line, for the genuine Mystic, is the battle fought and the guerdon won. There follows, sooner or later, that mysterious pain, called by S. John of the Cross “the dark night of the soul.” Not only need the seeker purify his physical nature; but the interior self must undergo this strange trial.

“ Et puis, et puis, quand tout des choses nécessaires  
L’homme, la patience et ce devoir dicté,  
Aura fructifié de mon mieux dans vos serres,

Ah ! tuez mon esprit, et mon cœur et mes sens !

Place à l’âme qui croie, et qui sente et qui voie

Que tout est vanité fors elle-même en Dieu ;

Place à l’âme, Seigneur, marchant dans votre voie

Et ne tendant qu’au ciel, seul espoir et seul lieu ! ”<sup>1</sup>

The above passage is pertinent because it suggests that true illumination is extra-sensible. No doubt, the senses must be “killed,” but that is not all. The real crux of the matter lies elsewhere. (The crucial preliminary to real enlightenment is the surrender of the will.)

In that ancient treatise, the “Book of

<sup>1</sup> “*Prière du Matin.*” By Paul Verlaine.

Wisdom," where, as must be evident to the most casual reader, Wisdom is super-sensible enlightenment, we learn that the light only shines on those who have surrendered their wills for Love's sake. How is Wisdom described there?

"She is the breath of the power of GOD, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty.

"She is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of GOD. . . .

"She is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars, being compared with the light she is found before it."

Then follow the mysterious words of warning combined with hope: "For after this cometh the light; but vice shall not prevail against wisdom."

The phrase, "being compared with the light (i.e. the natural light) she is found before it," is one which does not stand alone; we may compare: "I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light, for the light that cometh from her never goeth out,"<sup>2</sup> where, quite evidently, the antithesis is the same, natural as contrasted with supernatural light.

Two points may be noticed in this passage: "I

<sup>1</sup> "Wisdom," vii. 25, 26, 29. It may be interesting to compare the Vulgate:

"Vapor est enim virtutis Dei, et emanatio quædam est claritatis omnipotentis Dei sincera. . . .

"Candor est enim lucis æternæ, et speculum sine macula Dei majestatis. . . . Est enim hæc speciosior sole, et super omnem dispositionem stellarum, luci comparata, invenitur prior."

<sup>2</sup> "Wisdom," vii. 10.

... chose to have her," and "the light that cometh from her." The *choice* is essential; a choice is a matter of *will*.

In the first chapter of the "Book of Wisdom" we find the sentence: "The holy spirit of discipline will flee deceit"; again "Wisdom is a loving spirit"; and then the two ideas are, in the sixth chapter, combined—"For the very true beginning of her" (i.e. Wisdom) "is the desire of discipline, and the care of discipline is love. And love is the keeping of the law."<sup>1</sup>

It is not without interest, in the face of Dr Bucke's statement that "Las Casas was presumably possessed of cosmic consciousness, because (a) of his unusual health and strength; for this great faculty commonly occurs in exceptional physical organisations,"<sup>2</sup> to note that the writer of the "Book of Wisdom," making his choice, declared, "I loved her above health and beauty." It would not be difficult to find cases of illumination not combined with physical strength; perhaps Dr Bucke had forgotten his rather favourite *illuminé*, S. Paul.

(That the way to enlightenment is along the path of self-surrender is the lesson of all the Mystics.) "Who," says S. John of the Cross, "shall hinder God from doing His own will in a soul that is resigned, detached and self-annihilated?"<sup>3</sup> And again, "On this road,

<sup>1</sup> "Wisdom," vi. 17, 18.

<sup>2</sup> "Cosmic Consciousness," page 118.

<sup>3</sup> "Ascent of Mount Carmel," Vol. II., chapter iv., section 2.

therefore, to abandon one's own way is to enter on the true way, or to speak more correctly, to pass onwards to the goal; and to forsake one's own way is to enter on that which has none, namely God."<sup>1</sup> And yet, once more: "On this road, therefore, to have our own faculties in darkness is to see the light. . . . This relates to the spiritual road: he who is in darkness, blind as to his own proper and natural light, shall see supernaturally, and he who shall rely on any light of his own, the greater will be his blindness, and the more he shall be hindered on the way of the divine union."<sup>2</sup>

Extraordinarily remote as this self-oblation, self-merging in the Eternal is from the noisy self-assertion of this material twentieth century, yet perhaps even S. John of the Cross has not more nearly succeeded than Ruysbroeck had already done in conveying in human language the consummation of self-surrender in vision:

"Lorsqu'au-dessus de tout exercice d'amour nous sommes embrassés et saisis avec le Père et le Fils dans l'unité du Saint-Esprit, alors nous sommes tous un, comme le Christ Dieu et homme est un avec son Père dans leur mutuel amour sans limite. Et ce même amour nous consomme tous ensemble dans une fruition éternelle, c'est-à-dire en une essence bien heureuse et sans action, en dehors de compré-

<sup>1</sup> "Ascent of Mount Carmel," Vol. II., chapter iv., section 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II., chapter iv., section 7.

hension pour toute créature.<sup>1</sup> . . . Mais quand je dis que nous sommes un avec Dieu, il faut l'entendre de l'amour, et non pas de l'essence ni de la nature. Car l'essence de Dieu est créée, tandis que la nôtre est créée, entre Dieu et la créature la distinction est immense. C'est pourquoi, bien qu'ils soient unis, ils ne peuvent devenir absolument un."<sup>2</sup>

Jacob Boehme, the Lutheran, is as emphatic on this point as the Catholic S. John of the Cross and Ruysbroeck. In his "Discourse between Two Souls" the distressed soul asks: "What then shall I do to bud forth again and recover the first life, wherein I was at rest before I became an image?"

The enlightened soul answers: "Thou shalt do nothing at all but forsake thy own will, viz. that which thou callest I, or thyself."

In that other dialogue between a scholar, or disciple, and his master (concerning the supersensual life) the scholar asks:

"Sir, how may I come to the supersensual life, so that I may see God, and may hear God speak?"

The master replies:

"Son, when thou canst throw thyself into *that*, where no creature dwelleth, though it be but for a moment, then thou hearest what God speaketh."

<sup>1</sup>"Le Miroir du Salut Éternel," chapter xxiv. By Johann Ruysbroeck.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, chapter xxv.



DISCIPLE. Is that where no creature dwelleth near at hand, or is it afar off?

MASTER. It is in thee. And if thou canst, my son, for a while but cease from all thy thinking and willing, then shalt thou hear the unspeakable words of God.

DISCIPLE. How can I hear Him speak when I stand still from thinking and willing?

MASTER. When thou standest still from the thinking of self, and the willing of self; when both thy intellect and will are quiet and passive to the impressions of the Eternal Word and spirit; . . . then the Eternal hearing, seeing and speaking will be revealed in thee; . . . blessed art thou therefore if that thou canst stop the wheel of thy imagination and senses; forasmuch as hereby thou mayest arrive at length to see the great salvation of God. . . . Since it is naught indeed but thine own hearing and willing that do hinder thee, so that thou dost not see and hear God."

All through the dialogue, whose whole burden is the attainment of the supersensual life, this same lesson of the surrender of the will is insisted upon. Thus the Master says, "Three things are requisite. . . . The first is thou must resign thy will up to God. . . . The second is thou must hate thy own will. . . . The third is thou must bow thy soul under the Cross." And again: "Upon this entire surrender and yielding up of thy will, the love of God in thee becometh the life of thy nature; it killeth thee not, but quickeneth thee, who art now dead to thyself in

thine own will, according to its proper life, even the life of God.”<sup>1</sup>

Boehme practised his own tenets; he said of himself, “I have never desired to learn any sciences, but from early youth I strove after the salvation of my soul, and thought how I might inherit or possess the Kingdom of Heaven. Finding within myself a powerful contrariness, viz. the desires that belong to flesh and blood, I began to fight a hard battle against my corrupted nature. . . . Now, while I was wrestling and battling, being aided by God, a wonderful light arose within my soul. It was a light entirely foreign to my unruly nature, but in it I recognised the true nature of God and man, and the relation existing between them; a thing which heretofore I had never understood, and for which I would never have sought.”<sup>1</sup>

William Law, who published an English translation of Boehme’s writings, teaches the same lesson precisely in the preface he prefixed to the “*Signatura Rerum*”: “If you ask, what is the way to attain this wisdom? Behold, Christ, Who is the way, the truth and the life, tells you plainly in these words: ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.’” It would be easy to multiply instances, but these four, Jewish or Jewish-Hellenic, probably contemporary, or nearly so, with the Christian era, from Catholic Spain of the sixteenth century, from Catholic

<sup>1</sup> “The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme,” page 50. By Franz Hartmann.

Flanders in the fourteenth, from Lutheran Germany of the early seventeenth century, may be taken perhaps as sufficiently typical. (But after illumination comes the achievement of union, when, the will being surrendered, union has become possible between GOD and the cleansed soul of His servant,) now at last, as Ruysbroeck would say, His friend; a phrase which is also used in the "Book of Wisdom," many centuries previously: "Wisdom . . . is a treasure unto men that never faileth: which they that use become the friends of GOD";<sup>1</sup> and again, "She maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of GOD."<sup>2</sup>

In all this, one important truth should be remembered, viz. that though words give a certain definiteness to the comprehension of stages, and seem to set fixed boundary lines, yet, in reality, there is, in struggling human life, an intermingling of states, as the passage from Ruysbroeck already quoted shows, where illumination and union seem to come together, or, at any rate, are very difficult to disentangle.

As these states are incapable of strict determination from one another, so each particular state fails to lend itself to one and the same all-covering description. The question of *degree* cannot be left out of account:

"Thou spakest sometimes in visions unto Thy saints."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Wisdom," vii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vii. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm lxxxix. 20.

[No doubt these words enshrine the wonder of perfect illumination. But there are other forms: there is the sudden intuitive flash of apprehension, coming unexpectedly, yet ungainsayably; there is the unalterable conviction, gained unawares, for which no data are producible, but which proves to be truth. It is perhaps this latter kind of illuminated knowledge which specially provokes the so-called modern person.] The eighteenth century seems to have burned so effectually into the European mind its doctrine that "extra sense-arranged-by-understanding" knowledge is no knowledge at all, that still ordinary educated people are merely irritated by the production of an unshakable conviction which refuses to produce, or to consider the desirability or possibility of producing, its intellectual ground.

Concerning this kind of knowledge, Father Tyrrell once advised us wisely: "They who intuitively, or by inspiration, apprehend those divine truths to which others climb laboriously by slow reason and weary elimination of errors, are rather likely to be wrong when they proceed to give reasons for what they got without reason, and to entangle themselves in fallacies."<sup>1</sup>

Yet such considerations as these should not lead to a belittling of understanding. Let us just call to mind that passage in Dan Michel's translation of "*Le Somme des Vices et des Vertus*"

<sup>1</sup> "*Nova et Vetera*," cxvi. By Father George Tyrrell, S.J.

of the Dominican Frère Lorens, which he gave to his English brethren in 1340, with the title of "The Again-biting of Inner Wit": "Holy Writ teaches us two kinds of life, whereby we come to the life without . . . The first is called workaday (active) . . . the other is called restful (contemplative) . . . the two last (gifts) whereof we shall speak with the help of God and of the Holy Ghost, that is to wit, the gift of understanding and the gift of wisdom, belong to the other life, which is called restful. . . . Now, we will first talk of the gift of understanding, according as the Holy Ghost will teach us. (The gift which is called the gift of understanding is no other thing, according to the Hallows and Doctors, but a light and a grace of brightness which the Holy Ghost sends into the heart, whereby the understanding of man is stirred up to know his Creator, and the ghostly things that cannot be seen bodily, in all the things which belong to the soul's health, nor by the natural reason and understanding of men, of itself, nor for itself, can come to. This good is called light.)"

That "natural understanding" of which the eighteenth century could give no very clear genetic account, but to which it attributed considerable powers, was supposed by the fourteenth century to be supplemented by the "Light of the Holy Spirit," i.e. by the gift of understanding. Indeed, the sequence of Pentecost, the "Golden Sequence," is only a little earlier than the "Again-biting": to that illumined, mystical

age we owe the great petition which the faithful throughout the world still prefer :

“ Veni, sancte Spiritus  
Et emitte cœlitus  
Lucis tuæ radium.  
Veni pater pauperum;  
Veni dator munerum;  
Veni Lumen cordium.”

(When, however, we speak, as above, of unalterable convictions for which no data are producible, we ought to be careful, and seldom more so than now, not to encourage the misty meanderings of undisciplined minds.) There are a number, perhaps an increasing number, of people nowadays who mistake sentiment for thought and dreams for intuition. In this mood, they float luxuriously along the river of idleness, and as they watch

“ Les contours indécis des choses incertaines  
Se fondent dans le soir calme que rien n’émeut.”<sup>1</sup>

they seem to imagine that they are adding vastly to the stores of higher, spiritualised perception; whereas really they are only rambling emotionally, to no lasting or definite purpose. Nor is intuition a means whereby God will enable us to “ know ” matters which we could discover by our natural powers of reason and understanding, if only we were not too idle to use these. If we consider the dogmas of the Church, and, in general, the teaching of the Gospels, we shall

<sup>1</sup> “ Premières Poèmes.” *Frisson du Soir*. Henri de Regnier.

see that we are never taught authoritatively those things which we could perfectly well discover for ourselves. By illumination men may come to "see" (which is different from accepting by faith) the inner meaning of admonitions so contrary to the ordinary man's common sense as "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake"; but they will not, and they ought not to wish to, find by its aid the matches which they have lost merely through their own carelessness. Real intuition, real illumination only flashes forth that truth which is behind or above the phenomenal affairs of this material world, with all its cargo of sound experience—sound that is so far as it goes, and unless, as too often it is, it be spoiled by a degrading, sterilising conventionality. It cannot be too often said that the fact that all this is spiritual does not mean that it is "unpractical"; exactly the reverse is the case. It has been well said, "The lever which is to raise the world must rest upon an eternal fulcrum. That false and shallow view of the spiritual sphere as a cloud-land, and of those who live in its contemplation as dreamers, must be allowed no place. The best Mystics of the Middle Ages were unselfish benefactors of their kind."<sup>1</sup>

Huysmans' description of S. Teresa may be apposite here: "*Qu'elle soit une admirable psychologue, cela est sûr; mais quel singulier*

<sup>1</sup> "The Inner Light," page 229. By the Rev. A. R. Whately.

mélange elle montre aussi, d'une mystique ardente et d'une femme d'affaires froide. Car enfin elle est à double fond; elle est une contemplative hors le monde et elle est également un homme d'état; elle est le Colbert féminin des cloîtres. En somme, jamais femme ne fut et une ouvrière de précision aussi parfaite et une organisatrice aussi puissante. Quand on songe que, malgré d'invraisemblables difficultés, elle a fondé trente-deux monastères, qu'elle les a mis sous l'obédience d'une règle qui est un modèle de sagesse, d'une règle qui prévoit, qui rectifie les méprises les mieux ignorées du cœur, on reste confondu de l'entendre traitée par les esprits forts d'hystérique et de folle! L'un des signes distinctifs des mystiques, répondit, en souriant, l'Abbé, c'est justement l'équilibre absolu, l'entier bon sens."<sup>1</sup>

Possibly that balanced estimate, so accurate, so sympathetic, of the great Spanish Mystic may convince at least some doubters that "illumination" does not necessarily imply foolishness. What pressing need there is for balance. The human tendency towards non-mutual exclusions, towards alternatives which are not only gratuitous and superfluous, but actually misleading, is a grievous and disaster-working thing. Perhaps it never shows itself more reprehensibly than in this matter of exalting sense, reason and intuition at each other's expense. It does not much matter whether it be Locke and his modern

<sup>1</sup> "En Route," page 113. By J. K. Huysmans.



psychological disciples arguing that what cannot be known by the senses, and afterwards worked up by the understanding, is not knowledge at all; or whether it be an extremist like William Law, insisting, over-insisting, on the element of individual response in religion—both alike are guilty of “exclusions.” Law writes these fine passages: “It is the love of the world instead of God that constitutes the whole nature of the infidel”;<sup>1</sup> or again, of the Scriptures that they have “no other end in view but to teach him to renounce the tempers of his fallen earthly nature, and live unto God in faith and prayer; to be born again by the Divine Nature”;<sup>2</sup>—passages with which, after they have been subjected to a little interpretation, many of us can agree. But he is not content to stop there; he proceeds to these extravagant statements about individual capacity: “Nothing that is brought into the mind from without, or is only an idea beheld by our reasoning faculty, is any more our knowledge than the seeing our natural face in a glass is seeing our own selves”;<sup>3</sup> and, once more, “No honest, unlearned heart stands in any need of any commentator, to help him to all the benefit that can be had from Scripture, or secure him from any hurtful error.”<sup>4</sup>

He and those who think with him, when they

<sup>1</sup> “Liberal and Mystical Writings of William Law,” page 122.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 124.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 136.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, page 125.

write such dicta, designed as one cannot help thinking to strike a shrewd blow at what Law calls "opinions, sects, churches," seem to forget that they are proving too much, are showing indeed the entire superfluity of their own treatises. While it is certainly true that "religion is not a notion or opinion, but a real life growing up in God,"<sup>1</sup> that is no proof that reason is valueless. It simply is not true that "you can know nothing of God, of nature, of heaven, or hell, or yourself, but so far as all these things are self-evident in you";<sup>2</sup> nor is it true that the "Light of God cannot even by God Himself be communicated to you by any creature."<sup>3</sup> (Our Lord Himself taught the things of GOD, and poured light into the souls of His hearers, by means of parables, often taking as illustrations the homeliest physical facts.)

We learn "directly"—it is the whole purpose of this book to deal with intuitive apprehension—but we can also learn from others; we can learn by reasoning concerning direct or indirect experience, (we can learn through the aid of the senses.) Whence is that perverse quality in us which, poor and limited as we are already, is for ever impelling us towards useless, unnecessary impoverishment, by the denial of this, that, or the other power—by the refusal, the wilful refusal, to use all the gifts bestowed on us?

<sup>1</sup> "Liberal and Mystical Writings of William Law," page 144.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 145.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 137.

What is it which drives us to this species of heretical picking and choosing among natural capacities? If we make the utmost possible use of all we have and are, we shall still be far enough from perfection. (We know that sometimes GOD reveals Himself directly, but He has also granted us divers other means: the Sacraments and discipline of His Church; teachers, expositors, prophets, and every personal power and faculty any of us may possess, into the bargain. Because emphasis is rightly laid on the reality of illumination, that is far from being a denial or a minimising of the great gifts of the five senses, of the human reason, and of all that can issue from them.) Surely Father Tyrrell perceived this balance of powers when he wrote: "God must be sought, known and loved in His works, or nowhere. Hence it is primary to teach men to read those works aright, to 'taste' them and see how gracious must be their Maker. As to the works of physical nature, it is partly to science and partly to art that the duty of teaching men to observe and to admire belongs, while to ethics belongs the office of forming the moral taste by which we are drawn to love that word which God speaks to us in the human souls of the great and good; and above all in the Sacred Soul of the Incarnate, that inexhaustible treasure of moral beauty."<sup>1</sup>

If we realised more acutely that there are more ways of knowing than one, and if further

<sup>1</sup> "Nova et Vetera," pages 175, 176.

we realised that there is a connexion between understanding and illumination, that, to use human, even scientific language for the exposition of a mystery—the Holy Spirit can raise the natural understanding to a higher power, we might be more careful of our understandings than some of us are. The dreadful density and unawareness of many good people is only too familiar a spectacle. There is an astounding instance of it in the Gospels, conveyed in passages which many of us hear read often, and—is it too much to say?—listen to unmoved by the amazement which surely ought to greet such incredible failure to comprehend and to care. SS. Matthew and Mark record the whole story, the former as follows:

“ And JESUS, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart, in the way, and said unto them,

“ Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death.

“ And shall deliver Him to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge and to crucify Him; and the third day He shall rise again.

“ Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee’s children, with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him.

“ And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left,

“ But JESUS answered and said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with? And they said, We are able.”<sup>1</sup>

S. Mark's account differs in two particulars:

“ And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and JESUS went before them; and they were amazed, and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him.

“ Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles.

“ And they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him and shall kill Him; and the third day He shall rise again. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, Master, we would that Thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire.

“ And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?

“ They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory.

“ But JESUS said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of; and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?

<sup>1</sup> S. Matthew xx. 17-22.

“And they said unto Him, We can.”<sup>1</sup>

The discrepancy in the two records as to who asked the question, the mother or the sons, is of small account; for in both cases Our Lord addresses His answering question to the sons. What is of overwhelming importance is the story itself. Our Lord took the disciples aside, away from the crowd, and then, without any wrapping up of the bitter, dreadful details, told them what was coming on Him. S. Mark's addition—of their previous mental perturbation and fear—only adds to the astonishing nature of the sequel. We know how often the chosen twelve failed to understand His words; but that two of them should have met this so staggering statement of His approaching overwhelming woe, and the utter ruin of all their expectations, with a blunt request for their own personal aggrandisement is surely one of the most inexplicable of all the mysteries to be faced even in the long, dark tale of human weakness and failure. Their absolute inability to sympathise seems incredible. S. Peter's blunt refusal to believe in any such possibility, which a short time before had called forth the rebuke, “Get thee behind Me, Satan,”<sup>2</sup> is so much easier to understand. If they did not believe Him, they might at least have tried to argue the point. If they had, in the foolish way common to those who, for the moment at any rate, have no insight into that which is so clear to another, attempted to persuade Him that He

<sup>1</sup> S. Mark x. 32-39.

<sup>2</sup> S. Matthew xvi. 23.

was mistaken, that He was over-tired, that He was in any one of the endless states suggested to the dull by the inspired foresight of the enlightened, then we might have understood. But their entire refusal even to consider the details of what He had said, even to contemplate the accumulated outrages He was to suffer—the capture, the humiliation, the handing over to the hated Roman Conqueror, the brutal mocking, the criminal death—it is this refusal which it is so hard to comprehend, even though, in our own small way, we may, in hours of illumined dread, have sought for sympathy and found none; and even though, worse still by far, we cannot rid our minds of the irremediable recollection when, in their extremity, we have failed our own nearest and dearest. The *banale* worldliness of the request, from S. John too, the disciple whom He loved—"Grant unto us that we may sit one on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left, *in Thy Glory*"—it is this which is so crushing.

One would fain believe that the second incident did not, in fact, follow the first immediately. But how can that be believed in the face of S. Luke's record? He tells the same tale about the going up to Jerusalem, and then in the place of the sons of Zebedee episode, as if he could not bear to tell it, he writes with that poignancy so characteristic of him, and not for the only time, these piercing words: "But they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things that

were spoken.”<sup>1</sup> Further, is not S. John’s silence about both incidents significant?

Surely, any of us who will meditate on this signal instance of the failure of ordinary human “understanding” will see what need there is that we should never neglect it. If understanding be thus important, let us recollect further that will plays a part in illumination as it does in every other human state. Some readers were provoked by the mere title of Professor William James’s book, “The Will to Believe”; still more by his plea urged again and again (that will has a function to perform in belief.) As a matter of fact, surely will has that function in every human state; it is always positive or negative, very, very seldom truly neutral: of the moods of the will the other human states might well say, “He that is not with us is against us.”

Is the declaration, “Regnum cœlorum vim patitur et violenti rapiunt illud,” really a warning concerning the function of the will; a warning, an urging to action on their part, to those who would fain have light, who would really “see”?

Ruysbroeck, who is one of the classic writers on illumination, insists on the connexion between it and desire: “Les hommes qui n’ont que de *faibles désirs*, n’arrivent pas à adhérer fortement à l’essence divine, et à y être suspendus. Ils ne reçoivent pas le rayon divin.”<sup>2</sup>

In “Les Noces Spirituelles” Ruysbroeck

<sup>1</sup> S. Luke xviii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> “Livre des Amants de Dieu,” chapter xxx. By Johann Ruysbroeck.



speaks of the third way of "seeing" as "une conversion libre de la volonté," and, he continues, "cette volonté conflue dans l'unité de Dieu, et dans l'unité des pensées, afin que la créature raisonnable, puisse obtenir et posséder surnaturellement la sublime unité de Dieu. C'est pour cela que Dieu a créé le ciel, et la terre et toute chose."<sup>1</sup>

This brings us to another and important aspect of the matter. It is not only in the region of strictly spiritual things that illumination, or the direct apprehension of reality or intuition, obtains. If it were so, human life would be incalculably the poorer. Not only the saint, but the philosopher and the poet "see directly." We will leave the philosopher on one side for the present. (The poet may, often does, "see" spiritual things, but then he sees them as a poet, not as a theologian. Apart from all these, more dimly perhaps, with less definite consciousness of the fact, but still quite really, the great mass of average men and women share, more or less, with greater or rarer frequency, in this intuitive grasp of "le ciel et la terre et toute chose.")

The American psychologist, Dr Bucke, has used the term "cosmic consciousness" for the direct apprehension of truth in the phenomenal world, that direct vision which, so far at any rate as some mortals are concerned, cannot be rejected or gainsaid, and which to more than just

<sup>1</sup> "Les Noces Spirituelles," Book II., chapter i.

a few comes, if dubiously, yet not in such wise that they would dare to deny it outright:

“ Immured in sense, with five-fold bonds confined,  
     Rest we content if whispers from the stars,  
 In waftings of the incalculable wind  
     Come blown at midnight through our prison bars.”<sup>1</sup>

Those who are accustomed to connect illumination with spiritual devotion only, need not resent this “cosmic consciousness,” this apprehension of the Real Presence veiled in the phenomenal world; they do not even well to slight its value:

“ Lo, God’s two worlds immense,  
     Of spirit and of sense,  
         Wed  
     In this narrow bed;  
         . . . . .  
         . . . clear  
 To the ear within the ear,  
     But dense  
 To clay-sealed sense.”<sup>2</sup>

It was recognised early in the history of thought. (For example, the writer, or writers, of the Psalms had abundant consciousness of the sacramental aspect of this beautiful physical world.) Dr Bernard, writing of the various renderings the world possesses, said that “no translation of the Psalms has been so widely used in Europe as the Gallican Psalter”; and again, he described it as “one of the most venerable monuments of Christian antiquity; its influence has been

<sup>1</sup> “Poems,” page 24. By William Watson.

<sup>2</sup> “The Works of Francis Thompon,” vol. ii., pages 47, 48.

conspicuous both in theology and literature." There can therefore be no need to apologise for giving proofs from this stately rendering of the Hebrew belief in the sacramentalism of nature:

"Quoniam videbo cœlos tuos, opera digitorum tuorum: lunam et stellas quæ tu fundasti."<sup>1</sup>

"Cæli enarrant gloriam Dei, et opera manuum ejus annunciat firmamentum."<sup>2</sup>

"In templo ejus omnes dicent gloriam,"<sup>3</sup> where the "Temple" is obviously the universe of created things. And then there is that declaration: "Cœlum cœli Domino, terram autem dedit filiis hominum."<sup>4</sup> All, no doubt, depends here on the significance attached to *dedit*. But those who, when the whole structure of dogmatic religion has, under the blows of science or philosophy apprehending theology awry, lain in fragments around them, have still, in that hour of rending and separation, buried themselves in the quiet of some dearly loved beautiful place, and have heard deep in their heart of hearts that unquenchable, irresistible whisper, "In His Temple everything saith glory!" will not boggle over the meaning of *dedit*. He gave it indeed not more for their instruction than for their consolation in that drear day of loss. Least of all will men with that experience in their lives dream of confining illumination to the great religious Mystics: "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save"; in the hour when

<sup>1</sup> Psalms viii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, cxiii. 16.

human reason fails, when human doubt darkens, and the mingling of human knowledge and ignorance confounds, then He takes the scene at hand, and moulds that to His will, then "the Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," and that in no merely "sensible" way, but by an unanalysable yet irresistible awareness of omnipotent, omnipresent Being, veiling Itself in and breaking through phenomenal things.

It is indeed a dreadful blunder to relegate sacred things to a confined and shut-off region of life: ("It is the function of the best poetry and art to re-sensitise our attention, and to teach us to observe the beauties of those ordinary things and persons, which are continually before our irresponsible, use-worn gaze."<sup>1</sup>)

Only a perverse puritanism will drive art, poetry, and all the flaming aspirations of human desire from the steps of the Temple of God. Yet let no one be misled by the word desire: "Even as our fleshly eyes (wrote Luis de Granada) cannot behold the stars nor the beauty of Heaven when it is cloudy and overcast, so neither can the eyes of our souls contemplate the Eternal Light when they are obscured by the clouds and passions of this life."<sup>2</sup> For such clear vision we must be, as Ruysbroeck says, "*des hommes recueillis qui, sous l'influence de la grâce de Dieu, marchent en sa présence, avec le recueillement d'un esprit libre et élevé, qui entraîne après*

<sup>1</sup> "Nova et Vetera," page 115.

<sup>2</sup> "Spanish Mystics," page 25. By M. Tollemache.

lui le cœur et les sens, l'âme, le corps et toutes les puissances corporelles. Ils sont maîtres de leur esprit et de leur nature, et ils possèdent aussi la paix véritable. Car bien qu'ils puissent ressentir de temps en temps quelque émotion dans la nature, ils s'en rendent promptement victorieux, aucun mouvement vicieux ne pouvant avoir chez eux de durée."<sup>1</sup>

Of course many people are, and throughout life remain, wholly unaware of Being behind that which they would call an empty landscape. Moreover, those conscious of it detect differences between this place and that. There are people to whom the Downs of Sussex are alive and tingling with power, who may range for ever over Surrey's wooded hills and find indeed nothing but that beautiful landscape and the flower-bespread ground. People may ask—*how* is all this? By what medium is the communication made?

Who, aware of it, can tell him who is unaware? "There is neither speech nor language, but their voices are heard among them," so said the Psalmist.

"Le soir s'endort en du silence qui déchire,"<sup>2</sup> is another aspect of this mysterious communication; nor can anyone who has ever read it forget Pater's phrase, "the silence which is not negation." Since mysticism has been much written

<sup>1</sup> "Le Miroir du Salut Éternel," chapter xii. By Johann Ruysbroeck.

<sup>2</sup> "Premières Poèmes." By Henri de Regnier. Sonnets ii.

of lately, especially in the theological sphere, though perhaps not always with theological acumen and restraint, it may not be amiss to attempt a study of the poets' share in this enlightened awareness. More and more we are coming to see the futility of criticism which, by treating too wide an area, dooms itself to utter superficiality. I will therefore confine myself mainly to four English poets. The gradual neglect and oblivion into which Wordsworth appears to be falling is by itself a sufficiently weighty reason for trying to recall him to the general memory. Moreover, by some writers on illumination he has been treated with singular and wholly undeserved contempt. Dr Bucke writes of him: "That the mind of this writer (nearly if not quite a poet) in his loftier moods attained a very close neighbourhood to cosmic consciousness, if he did not actually enter into the magic territory of the Kingdom of Heaven, no one will deny who knows what these words mean, and who has read him with any sympathy."<sup>1</sup> It is a little difficult to treat with respect criticism which seems so gratuitously perverse as that. *De gustibus non est disputandum*—that is true; but then philosophy, poetry and theology are not wholly matters of taste. Besides, there are principles of criticism, so we have been trained to believe, which are something more than arbitrary expressions of individual opinion and feelings—"you must not

<sup>1</sup> "Cosmic Consciousness," page 236. By Dr. R. M. Bucke.

say, 'I like Homer,' or 'I don't like Homer,' unless you want to write yourself down a vulgarian,"<sup>1</sup> wrote a distinguished Oxford scholar—and certainly which are more, much more, than individual dogmatism.

Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to call by that severe name the temper of mind which can gloss the words, "I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven," with the following astonishing commentary: "The cosmic sense is the final arbiter of good and ill. Jesus seems to have looked forward to the establishment of a school or sect, the members of which should possess the cosmic sense."<sup>2</sup> Thus casually to dispose of a classic problem seems the very midsummer madness of "private judgment." Perhaps some more stringent criticism still is deserved by these painful passages concerning Walt Whitman, of whom Dr Bucke writes: "He saw what neither Gautama nor Paul saw, what Jesus saw, though not so clearly as he"<sup>3</sup>—the rest of the sentence is immaterial to my point; and again, "What living man, indeed, is able to say, time enough having surely gone by, who was the greater, Gautama or Jesus? And if we cannot decide between these two, still

<sup>1</sup> "Wayside Sketches in Ecclesiastical History," page 141. By Charles Bigg, D.D.

<sup>2</sup> "Cosmic Consciousness," page 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 192.

less can we between either of them and, for instance, Whitman."<sup>1</sup>

The form and contents of these passages argue the most extraordinary bluntness towards the sentiments and beliefs of a large, widely and variously experienced portion of the human race, a bluntness which it would hardly be extreme to call impudent egotism. Pardonable it might be in the mouths of the unlettered and half-educated, but surely inexcusable in the case of one who affects to carry about the philosopher's paraphernalia.

This has swept us far away from Wordsworth, and these wild dicta on others might incline us to attach no importance to Dr Bucke's criticism of him. Therefore we may remember that another popular writer on mysticism, Miss Evelyn Underhill, treats Wordsworth with halting appreciation. In the matter of illumination she classes him with Tennyson, and, oddly enough, considering Dr Bucke's exaggerated estimate, with Walt Whitman himself, as giving "certain indications that they too were acquainted beyond most poets and seers with the phenomena of illuminated life." This may sound quite flattering, but she began her sentence with the words, "Amongst those who cannot justly be reckoned as pure Mystics,"<sup>2</sup> a phrase whose meaning is hard to gauge, since the most mystical of us must have our unilluminated hours. "Pure," if it mean *uninterrupted*

<sup>1</sup> "Cosmic Consciousness," page 87.

<sup>2</sup> "Mysticism," page 286. By Evelyn Underhill.



mysticism, is surely beyond the power of mortal man on mortal earth.

The fact no doubt is that comparisons of poets tend ever to mislead. Victor Hugo, writing on geniuses, remarked, "Choisir entre ces hommes, préférer l'un à l'autre, indiquer du doigt le premier parmi ces premiers, cela ne se peut."<sup>1</sup>

Mr John Morley, in his introduction to the "Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth," writes in a similar vein. After mentioning the views of Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, Myers, on the one hand, and Swinburne on the other, concerning the degree of eminence which Wordsworth attained, he pleads with that quiet humour which often lit his writings, to be excused from all such efforts of appraising: "Amid these contentions of celestial minds it will be safest to content ourselves with one or two plain observations in the humble, positive degree without hurrying into high and final comparatives and superlatives."

That shall be the aim of the following pages: to analyse facts in the positive degree; to compare but not to depreciate; to contrast not invidiously but, if at all, illustratively, remembering that other passage in the same introduction which recalls the already quoted judgment of Victor Hugo: "We are not called upon to place great men of his stamp as if they were collegians in a college list."

<sup>1</sup> "William Shakespeare," page 72. By Victor Hugo.

Once more, if Wordsworth be not entitled to the name of *illuminé* on precisely the same grounds as Henry Vaughan and Francis Thompson are, yet his gift is peculiarly germane to the English genius and temperament. What Wordsworth was and felt, other Englishmen might be and feel without incurring any charge of exotic, bizarre ways. While his countrymen retain their ingrained insularity—as they seem likely to do for an incalculably long period—it may be worth while to show that a form, diluted no doubt, “worn with a difference,” but still a form of mysticism, of illumination, is quite compatible with the national characteristics.

Before passing on to consider illumination as exhibited in these four English poets, it may be just worth while to point out that this quality, which appears more or less sporadically among Englishmen, seems to be a racial characteristic of the poetry of Ireland. It is not to be confounded with the irremediable pathos of Irish poetry any more than with its ineradicable gaiety. Both are indigenous; but while gaiety might not be confused with illumination—since not everyone can realise that joyfulness is a natural element in sanctity—it is not unlikely that Celtic pathos might be; that quality of infinite regret which can bathe a memory in the dreaming pain of a lost past, until the dead almost return to life again, and that which is irrevocably absent seems on the point of appearing; the kind of yearning which has inspired many poems of many lands, the pain which thrills in “Innisfree”:

" I will arise and go now for always night and day,  
 I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the  
 shore;  
 While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavement grey,  
 I hear it in the deep heart's core—

or in that last heart-breaking stanza of Henri de  
 Regnier :

" Car, j'évoque les soirs de funestes départs,  
 Où dans la chambre obscure et veuve de l'absente,  
 On rassemble, en pleurant, dans l'ombre grandissante,  
 Le trésor douloureux des souvenirs épars."<sup>1</sup>

(Illumination is light on the living present, an unanalysable flash, or steady shining as the case may be, which almost changes human time into the "instant of eternity," rather than á halo round days which come no more : " Au dessus de la raison, et en dehors de la raison nous recevons un clair savoir, où il n'y a plus de distance entre nous et Dieu," wrote Ruysbroeck;<sup>2</sup> and what is that but A. E.'s :

" . . . mountain places  
 Where God from the stars dropt nearer  
 Our pale, dreaming faces."<sup>3</sup>

And we find the same idea in an early Irish Christian poem :

" King of the seven heavens, grant me for dole  
 Thy love in my heart, Thy light in my soul."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Premières Poèmes." *Frisson du Soir*. By Henri de Regnier.

<sup>2</sup> "Le Miroir du Salut Éternel," chapter xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> "The Divine Vision." By A. E.

<sup>4</sup> "The Poem Book of the Gael," page 120. By E. Hull.

Somewhere between the mood of exalted memory and that of actual illumination we might perhaps put that unforgettable poem of Seumas O'Sullivan—"The Sheep":

"Whitely they gleam  
For a moment and vanish  
Away in the dimness  
Of sorrowful years:  
Gleam for a moment  
All white, and go fading  
Away in the greyness  
Of sundering years."<sup>1</sup>

Not every flock of sheep, every evening, appears just so to every passer-by.

(The belief in illumination, in inspiration, as a way of knowledge, quite distinct from the experience of the five senses, is as old as the written literature of Ireland.) That the poet's inspiration was believed to be a *divine* endowment appears perfectly clearly in the "Book of Leinster." The colloquy of the two sages is quoted from it by Miss Hull in "The Poem Book of the Gael." Herein are several references to the fact of the belief in direct inspiration, e.g. the young poet says:

"From the red sunrise of the dawn I come,  
Where grow the nine hazels of poetic art."

And he adds:

"There is a land where righteousness is instilled"; *instilled*—not acquired or garnered

<sup>1</sup> "Poems," page 5. By Seumas O'Sullivan.

by experience, but *given*. In his turn, the old poet announces:

“ I move along the columns of age,  
Along the streams of inspiration,  
Along the elf-mound of Nechtan’s wife,  
Along the fore-arm of the wife of Nuada,  
Along the fair land of knowledge,  
The bright country of the sun ;

. . . . .  
Along the first beginnings of life.”

When we read the passage from the “ Book of Leinster ” which Miss Hull has prefixed to the poem, the meaning of the second, third, and fourth lines of the above quotation is clear: “ One day the young poet Nede fared forth till he stood on the margin of the sea, for the poets believed the brink of water to be the place for poetic revelation.”

The stream to which the old poet refers is the Boyne, at whose source grew the “ hazels ” which figure so constantly in Irish poetry—whose nuts of knowledge brought inspiration to the poet, and wherein (i.e. in the Boyne’s waters) lived the “ salmon of knowledge,” again food for the poets.

In “ Amorgen’s Song,” which may, so some think, be less ancient than it claims to be, we find similar thoughts, e.g.:

“ I am a salmon in a pool,”

i.e. in the pools of knowledge. The whole

burden of this song is the belief in the special enlightenment of the Druid poet:

"Who, but I, will make clear every question?"

Who (but the poet) knows in what place the sun goes down?"

and so forth.

Among the moderns, Mr Yeats has preserved belief in water's power of inspiration, and in the sacredness of the hazel—the Irish tree of life—in "Aedh hears the cry of the sedge":

"I wander by the edge  
Of this desolate lake,  
Where wind cries in the sedge  
*Until the axle break  
That keeps the stars in their round.*"

Perhaps to the ordinary English reader this is too elusive to convey meaning; it may be supplemented by lines from "Mongan thinks of his past greatness":

"I have been a hazel tree and they hung  
The Pilot Star and the Crooked Plough  
Among my leaves in times out of mind."

Or, clearest still, perhaps, in A. E.'s "Nuts of Knowledge":

"And when the sun sets dimmed in eve, and purple  
fills the air,  
I think the hazel tree is dropping berries there,  
From starry fruitage waved aloft where Connla's  
well o'erflows;  
For sure the enchanted waters run through every wind  
that blows."

If the reader grasp the sacredness of the hazel tree, the old Irish belief that the stars sometimes

hang on it as fruit, and grasp also the fact that the *axle*, of the previous poem, was of hazel-wood, some drifting light may illumine him. The hazel tree recurs again and again in Irish poetry. In "The Wandering of Oisín" are the lines:

"For he is strong and crafty as the seas  
That sprang under the Seven Hazel Trees."

Wandering Aengus, too, when the fire was in his head—and what is that but illumination?—cut him a hazel wand for a fishing-rod, and, with a berry from it, caught the "little silver trout," which became the "glimmering girl" who led him through time and space, consumed with the desire to find her again, and pluck

"The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun."

The exact meaning, woven as it is of the ancient folk-lore of the country, and of the racial grip on things not of sense, which has not yet deserted the Irish, and of that awareness of that which is not palpably "there" (that quality which in the eyes of more practical people makes them so shamelessly careless of the tangible things which "really matter"), the exact meaning of so elusive a warp and woof may easily escape the English reader. But he can scarcely help knowing that the atmosphere is not his own familiar, comfortable one, that the hazel yields him no pleasant edible nuts, and that the salmon of that knowledge will never grace his board.

Equally separate is it from that grave, noble intuition of supersensible things glowing with a light more glorious than of setting suns, which Wordsworth and a few other great Englishmen have possessed. The English and Irish races differ profoundly; moreover, neither is homogeneous throughout, men of the same race can be strangely unlike one another. It is a futile occupation to compare them to each other's disadvantage, while the task of bringing them to understand one another seems beyond mortal power.

In spite of its diaphanous texture and ephemeral substance, or rather because of it, the illumination of Irish poetry is an undeniable fact; and it is anything but soberly based on or in any way derived from our useful five senses. Surely the unquenchable longing of Laegh's exclamation to Cuchulain quivers with the "light" of knowledge:

"If all evil were mine  
And the Kingdom of Magh Bred of gold,  
I would give it (no small test)  
Could I frequent the place where I have been."

The "place," of course, is fairyland. But what a radiance from elsewhere streams out upon the everyday world from that wistful desire:

"Could I frequent the place where I have been."

(Perhaps it is not too much to say that the main charm of true Irish poetry is the sense conveyed by it always that what is seen does not really count, while what is beyond, behind,



hidden is everything. What is that but illumination?—of a highly elusive kind, perhaps, but still illumination; a direct, immediate “awareness” of reality, of the one thing needful, of the land of heart’s desire, which beggars the present tangible world of its derived values, and empties it of its inferred meanings.

In the poem of County Kerry, “The White Paternoster,” immediately succeeding the lines:

“I put Mary with her Son between you and your fears,  
Brigit with her mantle,  
Michael with his shield.”<sup>1</sup>

there comes a line which gives the impression of a sudden vision, a spontaneous intuition of omnipotent power flashing in from behind on the powers deliberately invoked:

“And the two long white hands of God from behind  
folding us all.”

The only exact parallel to the vivid picture here that I know is to be found in the exquisite hymn from a Greek Orthodox Penitential Service, where the same image appears:

“Lord, take me back into Thy Heart of Love,  
And lead me back into Thy Light, and let  
My lips find once again Thy Feet, and prove  
Mine eyes are wet.

“And let Thy thin white hands extend above  
My sinful head, and cleanse me as they spare:  
O take me back into Thy Heart of Love  
And keep me there.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “The Poem Book of the Gael,” page 242. By E. Hull.

<sup>2</sup> “A Little Orthodox Manual,” page 102. Done into English by F. W. Groves Campbell, LL.D.

Though much more might be written on the subject, enough has been said for it to become plain presently that Irish illumination differs in quality from English. One difference perhaps is fundamental. There is a vein of something which might be called paganism in this occult vision of Ireland, as if the former spirits still held a kind of shivering tenancy even after Christianity had won its way. It is hard to believe quite that the Sidhe are gone utterly, wholly banished from the still enchanted air; hard to admit that no longer

“The host is rushing ’twixt night and day,”  
that they have lost all power over those not, in the common sense, absent-minded, but other-minded dwellers in the remote corners of that haunted land.

Another difference, perhaps as marked, is the wholly dissimilar standard of values.

“The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told.”

There are many English people who love beauty, who would grieve considerably over deformity and ugliness; but that equably balanced disposition is not the inspiration of Yeats' line. It is in this region probably that the real reason of the undoubted incompatibility of the two races lies. Down in their hearts they are just that, incompatible, as anyone may know who hears one of either race deliver himself freely concerning the other; they can never come together till the “light” be changed for one or other or both

of them. But what is the use of talking to politicians about light?

If the English poets' illumination be less skyey, vaporous, less shot through with the wavering light or shimmering mists of dawn or "moth-time," it is somehow, in some of them—notably in Wordsworth and Browning, and to some degree in them all—even as a consequence nearer to human conduct; one might say it is more practical in the bearable sense of that misused word; yet it hardly seems so ingrained and elemental as the Irish sense of things unseen, a sense so impossible to take from them that one wonders why, for instance, A. E. should have uttered that warning:

"Keep the secret sense celestial  
Of the starry birth,  
Though about you call the bestial  
Voices of the earth."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Songs by the Homeward Way." By A. E.

## HENRY VAUGHAN

IN his preface to the edition of his poems published in 1655, Vaughan refers to certain unnamed writers as poets who "aimed more at verse than at perfection." Stated so, it is a false antithesis, another instance of that human tendency to make vain and futile alternatives of qualities which should be concomitants. It is indeed obvious that "perfection" in poetry must include that of matter and form. At the same time we have to admit that Vaughan has not imitated the people he blames, but has turned the matter about, caring more, as a rule, for what he was trying to say than for the manner in which he said it.

To this same edition of the "Silex Scintillans," immediately after the dedication, and the quotation from Hezekiah's prayer, Vaughan prefixed a poem, twelve lines long, without any title, wherein, by an apostrophe, he calls men away from "experience" to "illumination." Of course, in one sense, illumination is part of experience, but the latter word is used here in its right philosophical sense, for a *posteriori* as distinguished from a *priori* knowledge. The

opening lines, with their daring contrast, startle the mere empirical observer:

“Vain wits and eyes  
Leave, and be wise.”

(What is this but the mystic, the direct, the intuitive way to knowledge?) In the lines which follow we are reminded irresistibly of Pascal, of the marvellous, unexplained "Feu":

“ Abuse not, shun not holy fire,

And fire will purge your callous veil."

Remarkable words surely at any period; doubly so in the midst of that seventeenth century which seemed to be recovering the mystical insight which had distinguished the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. We cannot pretend that Vaughan knew anything about Pascal's experience, which had actually occurred in 1564, that is one year before this second edition of "Silex Scintillans" appeared; for the original of the "Amulet" was not discovered till a few hours after Pascal's death in August, 1662. The paper, in his handwriting, passed into the possession of his sister, Madame Périer. On her death, in 1687, her children handed it to a friend, who wrote a commentary upon it. This Friar's commentary is lost, but the original precious paper is still preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris.

It must have been a coincidental flash of light illuminating men so unlike, in many ways, as Pascal and Vaughan. Coincidental—for if

Vaughan's poem be less charged with inexpressible emotion than Pascal's broken, exalted phrases, yet the underlying conviction is of identical texture:

“ Depuis environ dix heures et demi du soir,  
Jusques environ minuit et demi.

—— FEU ——

Dieu d'Abraham. Dieu d'Isaac. Dieu de Jacob,  
Non des philosophes et des savans,  
Certitude, joye, certitude, sentiment, veue joye paix.

Joye, joye, joye, et pleurs de joye.”

Just a year later, Vaughan wrote:

“ Abuse not shun not holy fire,  
But with true tears wash off your mire.  
Tears and these flames will soon grow kind,  
And mix an eye-salve for the blind.  
Tears cleanse and supple without fail,  
And fire will purge your callous veil,  
Then comes the light! which when you spy,  
And see your nakedness thereby,  
Praise Him Who dealt His gifts so free,  
In tears to you and fire to me.”

A wider, profounder barrier than the Channel separates the French genius from the English. Yet, in these two outpourings, in spite of racial and temperamental differences, there is an undeniable similarity of vision, and of the means of vision.

\* (Pascal sees—not the GOD of philosophers and learned men; Vaughan perceives GOD by grasping his own nakedness, valuelessness; and both come by the preparation of penitential tears, till,

then and there, they are illumined by mystic fire.)

It is interesting to note that Vaughan's poem refers not only to illumination, but to that other pre-essential stage, purgation. Research has garnered so few details of his private life that we perhaps shall have to continue to look in vain for the events which between 1651, when the first edition appeared, and 1655, the date of the second, led him to write this mystical poem, which Mr Hutton in the popular edition of Vaughan's poems<sup>1</sup> so unfortunately omits. He states that he has followed Mr E. K. Chambers' text with an alteration in the order, and the omission of "the translations and a few fragments." The deletion of this remarkable little poem is a grave one, from the point of view of the student of that most interesting element in Vaughan's poetry, his mysticism.

In his quotations from Hezekiah's prayer, which, in the edition of 1655, follow immediately after the author's preface, Vaughan follows, in some verses, the Authorised Version—which had appeared in 1604—and in others he seems to translate from the Vulgate. In one verse, he follows neither. The Authorised Version reads, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit, so wilt Thou recover me and make me to live";<sup>2</sup> while the same passage in the Vulgate is, "Domine, si sic vivitur et in talibus vita spiritus mei, corripies me

<sup>1</sup> Published by Messrs Methuen.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah xxxviii. 16.

et vivificabis me." But Vaughan's rendering is rather that of a man to whom the Mystic's attitude has become a second nature, who knows no "reality" save in and from Divinity—"O Lord, by Thee doth man live, and from Thee is the life of my spirit; therefore wilt Thou recover me and make me to live."

(It is, of course, of the essence of the mystical position that illumination is a divine gift. Yet there may be, in some mortals, a predisposing temperament to its reception. The student of Vaughan will realise that his nature showed two marked characteristics of this predisposing kind; his remarkable power of interpreting the beauty of wild nature, and his unusual grasp of spiritual things; qualities which in his case interacted, but which are not at all necessarily found in one and the same person.)

In "Resurrection and Immortality" he describes clearly enough the natural unenlightened powers of the normal human being, contrasting it, not with the condition of supernatural illumination experienced here on earth, but with the hoped-for light of immortality:

"Then I that here saw darkly in a glass  
     But mists and shadows pass,  
 And by their own weak shine did search the springs  
     And course of things,  
     Shall with enlightened rays  
     Pierce all their ways;  
 And as thou saw'st, I in thought could go  
     To Heaven or Earth below  
     To read some star, or min'ral, and in state  
     There often sate;



So shalt thou then with me,  
Both wing'd and free—  
Rove in that mighty and eternal light,  
Where no rude shade, or night  
Shall dare approach us; we shall there no more  
Watch stars, or pore  
Through melancholy clouds, and say,  
*Would it were Day!*  
One everlasting *Sabbath* there shall run  
Without *Succession* and without a *Sun*."

The groping, slow methods of the discursive understanding are here contrasted with the instant intuition of the immortal soul. But Vaughan knew the reality of intuition, of illumination here and now. It is not perhaps very clearly indicated, but it is suggested at any rate in the first poem of "*Silex Scintillans*," where the unlocated place of vision is clearly not any "fair fresh field" which could have been found in a morning's walk by any and every one of Vaughan's contemporaries:

"A virgin soil, which no  
Rude feet e'er trod;  
Where—since He stept there—only go  
Prophets and friends of God,"

so he describes it.

The fundamental distinction between imagination—whether merely and accurately repetitive, or "creative"—and illumination is clearly brought out in "*The Search*." Vaughan, *in imagination*, reviews some of the chief events in Our Lord's life, and then exclaims suddenly, in

utter condemnation of these methods of understanding :

“ Leave, leave thy gadding thoughts,  
           Who pores  
           And spies,  
           Still out of doors  
           Descries  
       Within them, naught.

Search well another world : who studies this  
 Travels in clouds, seeks manna where none is.”

That “ other world ” is surely the region of direct perception, an illuminated world.

The careful student cannot miss the fact that Vaughan actually pierced the shows of this world and had moments of “ reality.” Professor Mackail, in his “ Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology,” thus translates Ptolemæus :

“ I know that I am mortal and ephemeral : but when I scan the multitudinous circling spirals of the stars, no longer do I touch earth with my feet, but sit with Zeus himself, and take my fill of the ambrosial food of gods.”<sup>1</sup> Yet that was a meagre, somewhat material vision compared with Vaughan’s :

“ I saw Eternity the other night  
       Like a great ring of pure and endless light,  
       All calm, as it was bright ;  
       And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,  
       Driven by the spheres  
       Like a vast shadow moved ; in which the world  
       And all her train were hurl’d.”

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<sup>1</sup> Page 76.

He goes on to comment on the various sons of men absolutely engrossed and absorbed in material interests, and then cries:

“ O fools—said I—thus to prefer dark night  
Before true light!  
To live in grotts and caves, and hate the day  
Because it shows the way;  
The way which from this dead and dark abode  
Leads up to God;  
A way where you might tread the sun and be  
More bright than He!  
But as I did their madness so discuss,  
One whisper'd thus,  
This ring the Bridegroom did for none provide  
But for His Bride.”

That the light of illumination was, for Vaughan, no kind of physical light is perfectly clear from the two closing stanzas of one of the most beautiful poems he ever wrote, “The Night”:

“ But living where the sun  
Doth all things wake, and where all mix and tyre  
Themselves and others, I consent and run  
To ev'ry myre;  
And by this world's ill-guiding light,  
Err more than I can do by night.  
“ There is in God, some say  
A deep, but dazzling darkness; as men here  
Say it is late and dusky, because they  
See not all clear.  
O for that night! where I in Him  
Might live invisible and dim! ”

So far as I am aware, there is no evidence that Henry Vaughan was acquainted with the writ-

ings of S. John of the Cross, yet how aptly the above stanzas recall the saint's words: "It is true, speaking after the manner of men, that GOD is as dark a light to the soul as faith."<sup>1</sup> As he goes on to speak of the "three divisions . . . of the night of the soul," he says: "The second night of faith relates to the higher, to the rational nature of man, and is therefore more interior and obscure because it deprives us of the light of reason, or rather, to speak more clearly, makes it blind. Thus the comparison between it and midnight is made good, for that is the most obscure and most perfect portion of the night."<sup>2</sup> And this, of course, refers back to an earlier passage, describing the "three nights of the soul," as being really "one divided into three parts. The first, which is that of sense, may be likened to the commencement of night, when material objects begin to be invisible. The second, of faith, may be compared to midnight, which is utter darkness. The third resembles the close of night, which is GOD, when the dawn of day is at hand."<sup>3</sup>

Now, of course, S. John of the Cross was not only one of the greatest Mystics the world has known, but also a trained theologian. Vaughan was a doctor of medicine. That his account of the "dazzling darkness" should approach so nearly to the Spanish Mystic's is a highly significant fact.

<sup>1</sup> "The Ascent of Mount Carmel," Book II., chapter ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II., chapter ii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I., chapter iii., section 5.

The illumination of night, such a seeming contradiction in terms, also struck Walt Whitman. Without admitting Dr Bucke's extravagant plea—"Walt Whitman is the best, most perfect example the world has so far had of the cosmic sense"<sup>1</sup>—we may still maintain that he was a genuine *illuminé*. It is not easy, by quotations from his exquisite poem, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," to give the mysterious sense of illumined darkness which, in its entirety, it conveys:

"Passing the visions, passing the night,

I cease from my song for thee,

Yet each to keep and all, retrievments out of the night,

Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory  
ever to keep for the dead I loved so well,

For the wisest, sweetest soul of all my days and lands  
—and this for his dear sake,

Lilac, and star, and bird twined with the chant of my  
soul,

There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and  
dim."

There is wanting in Whitman's lines the Catholic feeling which inspires both S. John of the Cross and Vaughan, but there is in them that underlying mysterious knowledge, direct intuition, profound, immediate conviction of reality which no amount of the exercise of reason or the operations of the understanding can give—"retrievments out of the night" of human

<sup>1</sup> Cosmic Consciousness," page 186.

limitations and losses; light penetrating the sombre shadows of the world's "cedars dusk and dim."

Very little is known for certain of Vaughan's literary interests: his early education may fairly be described as somewhat desultory. Though he appears to have been a student of Jesus College, no record remains even of his matriculation, while his brother Thomas proceeded to a degree. Leaving Oxford thus without a hall-mark, Henry pursued some vague legal studies in London, until the outbreak of the Civil War suggested his prompt return to his father's house. No definite information about his literary tastes has been found; we know nothing of his favourite authors, as we can, e.g., make a list of Montaigne's. Even his debt to George Herbert is disputed. Dr Grosart's view is tersely expressed: "Summarily I deny that Henry Vaughan was an imitator of George Herbert." Before I ever read that, but after a comparison of Vaughan and Herbert, I wrote in a paper in the "Modern Languages Quarterly": "Comfort and stimulus; there is the sum of Vaughan's debt," i.e. to Herbert. Some critics have shown parallel passages between the two poets, or passages which they have deemed to be such. But what they do not seem to perceive is the radical difference between the two; a difference which is surely best conveyed if we say that Vaughan was *essentially* a Mystic and Herbert was not. Essentially! There is, I believe, no proof that he had studied the works of the great Mystics who preceded him. We

find no direct hints of his possessing or borrowing, or reading, e.g. any of those of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, S. Catharine of Siena, S. John of the Cross, or Jacob Boehme. And yet his mysticism is in the true direct line. It is "interior":

"Thus hast Thou plac'd in man's outside  
Death to the common eye,  
That heaven within him might abide  
And close eternity."<sup>1</sup>

Or again:

"I . . . . . came at last  
To search myself where I did find  
Traces and sounds of a strange kind.  
Here of this mighty spring I found some drills  
With echoes beaten from the eternal hills.  
Weak beams and fires flash'd to my sight."<sup>2</sup>

It is direct intuition, a power separate entirely from sense, not empirical in any way:

"Besides I've lost  
A train of lights, which in these sunshine days  
Were my sure guides: and only with me stays  
Unto my cost  
One sullen beam."<sup>3</sup>

And again (speaking not of the individual this time, but rather of the race) he says:

"Sure it was so. Man in those early days  
Was not all stone and earth;  
He shin'd a little, and by those weak rays  
Had some glimpse of his birth."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Thou that know'st for whom I mourn."

<sup>2</sup> "Vanity of Spirit."

<sup>3</sup> "Man's Fall and Recovery."

<sup>4</sup> "Corruption."

Further, there is the perhaps better known passage:

"Happy those early days, when I  
Shined in my angel infancy!

While yet I had not walk'd above  
A mile or two from my first Love,  
And looking back—at that short space—  
Could see a glimpse of His bright face;  
When on some gilded cloud or flow'r  
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,  
And in those weaker glories spy  
Some shadows of Eternity."

Nor should we forget the lines:

"But I have one pearl by Whose light  
All things I see;  
And in the heart of earth and night  
Find heaven and thee."

Vaughan, though he phrases it differently, believed, so far as one can see, in the "spark at the apex of the soul":

"Lord, since Thou didst in this vile clay  
That sacred ray,  
The Spirit plant, quick'ning the whole  
With that one grain's infused wealth."

It is idle for anyone to argue that Vaughan was simply referring to the gift of faith. Of that he speaks in quite a different vein in the poem whose title is "Faith." Although he apostrophises it in the words

"Bright and blest beam!"

he does not treat it as he treats illumination.

<sup>1</sup> "The Retreat."

<sup>2</sup> "Silence and Stealth of Days."

<sup>3</sup> "Repentance."



Without any doubt the latter is held by Vaughan to be direct light from the Source of all light and all reality as differentiated from phenomena :

" When first I saw True Beauty and Thy Joys  
Active as light, and calm without all noise,  
Shin'd on my soul, I felt through all my pow'rs  
Such a rich air of sweets, as evening show'rs  
Fann'd by a gentle gale convey . . .  
I am so warm'd now by this glance on me  
That midst all storms I feel a ray of Thee."

Moreover, his is the mystic view that it is *sin* which clouds and obscures the direct vision of God; for the earlier poem quoted admits the existence still of "one sullen beam." Vaughan distinctly says that he enjoyed illumination

" Felt through all this fleshly dress  
Bright shoots of everlastingness."

and enjoyed it while he was in a condition of innocence, while his sin was not deliberate and embraced :

" Before I taught my tongue to wound  
My conscience with a sinful sound,  
Or had the black art to dispense  
A sev'ral ray to every sense."

His is the true mystical doctrine that only those who are "pure in heart" see God; the purity of innocence or the purity of penitence constitute for him the vantage-ground

" Whence th' enlightened spirit sees  
That shady city of palm trees."

◀ Something has intervened between this light

<sup>1</sup> " Mount of Olives."

<sup>2</sup> " The Retreat."

and man; and that something every Mystic, and with them Vaughan, knows is sin: )

“ Only this veil which Thou hast broke  
And must be broken yet in me,  
This veil I say is all the cloak  
And cloud which shadows Thee from me,  
This veil Thy full-ey'd love denies,  
And only gleams and fractions spies.

“ O take it off ! make no delay ;  
But brush me with Thy light that I  
May shine unto a perfect day,  
And warm me at Thy glorious Eye !  
O take it off ! or till it flee,  
Though with no lily, stay with me ! ”

If the technique of these lines be not perfect, the Mystic's longing for full illumination is at any rate unmistakable.

Moreover, as ever with the Mystics, so with Vaughan, there is the one pre-essential, purified love :

“ . . . oft have I press'd  
Heaven with a lazy breath ; but fruitless this,  
Pierc'd not ; love only can with quick access  
Unlock the way  
When all else stray. ”

(In this generation, unfortunately prone to superficial learning, it cannot be too often insisted on that mysticism is not a vague exaltation, a glorious intoxicated way of talking, it has a definite aim and a definite plan of compassing it. This aim Vaughan had, and he perceived the means, perceived them apparently

<sup>1</sup> “ Cock-crowing.”

<sup>2</sup> “ The Shower.”

as S. Paul did—"not of men, neither by men"—for, as I have said, there is no evidence that Henry Vaughan studied the writings of the Mystics.

It would be no small gain if people could resolutely grasp the fact that fine poetic flights need possess no element of mysticism at all. Crashaw is often spoken of as a "mystical poet"; among his poems none are admired more than those to S. Teresa. Now, the whole burden of his hymn to that great Saint is a promise of illumination in Heaven, which, by implication at any rate, he seems to deny she possessed on earth. Crashaw's view, in this latter respect, is not borne out by S. Teresa's own writings; but that does not put into his poems the mystical illumination which lights her books.

(Too often, again, the word mystical is treated as if it were a mere synonym of *religious*.) The mystic spirit is not merely religious. Vaughan, like anybody else, could write religiously without departing into mysticism. There is no trace of the latter in "Peace," which, perhaps, from the devotional and also from the technical point of view, must be placed among his most perfect poems:

"My soul there is a country  
Afar beyond the stars  
Where stands a wingèd sentry  
All-skilful in the wars.  
There above noise and danger,  
Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles,  
And One born in a manger  
Commands the beauteous files.

He is thy gracious Friend,  
And—O my soul awake!—  
Did in pure love descend,  
To die here for thy sake.  
If thou canst get but thither,  
There grows the flower of Peace,  
The Rose that cannot wither,  
Thy fortress and thy ease.  
Leave then thy foolish ranges;  
For none can thee secure,  
But One Who never changes,  
Thy God, thy life, thy cure."

Among English poets Vaughan can, as a matter of fact, lay claim to a larger share of illumination, in the strict sense of the word, than fell to the lot of most of them. Of his contemporaries it is Thomas Traherne who most nearly approaches him, and that, as some of us will think, by outstripping him. It is no small proof that mysticism is entirely outside sense-experience, that it is a mode of vision utterly independent of physical means, that it is a way of life wholly removed from all material considerations and tangible environment, that Henry Vaughan should have written his poems, and Thomas Traherne his "Centuries of Meditation" in the disturbed and intolerably painful years of the Civil War. Away from the distressing scenes wrought by human wilfulness, Traherne raised his inward vision to the Cross, which "is the abyss of wonders, the centre of desires, the school of virtues, the house of wisdom, the throne of love, the theatre of joys, and the place of sorrows. It is the root of

happiness, and the gate of Heaven";<sup>1</sup> and then, deliberately accepting the Mystic's medium of attainment, "By love alone is God enjoyed, by love alone delighted in, by love alone approached or admired,"<sup>2</sup> he proclaims adoringly the power of Love's supreme sacrifice to raise men above the dust and chaos and misery of their own wretched misdeeds: "This Man bleeding here was tutor to King Charles the Martyr, and Great Master to S. Paul, the convert who learned of Him activity and zeal unto all nations. Well therefore may we take up with this prospect, and from hence behold all the things in Heaven and earth. Here we learn to imitate JESUS in His love to all."<sup>3</sup>

And so, on that high note, which recalls the earlier English Mystic, Richard Rolle—"Truth may be without love: but it cannot help without it"—we may leave them both, and turn to Wordsworth, whose peculiar gift of descrying hidden reality through phenomena was faintly foreshadowed by Vaughan:

"All things here show him heaven; waters that fall,  
Chide and fly up: mists of corruptest foam  
Quit their firs and beds and mount; trees, herbs,  
flowers, all  
Strive upwards still, and point him to his home,"

though Vaughan far outstripped Wordsworth in direct intuitive vision of divine things.

<sup>1</sup> "Centuries of Meditation," page 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 61.

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

THE foregoing brief account of Vaughan has passed far beyond illumination to other mystical elements in his writing and thought, but Wordsworth recalls us to illumination, and yet to a different form of it from that common to the saints, as Vaughan's also, though less so than Wordsworth's, was different from theirs. Perhaps two passages from Thomas à Kempis may suggest this distinction best. The first, "*Amor vult esse liber et ab omni mundana affectione alienus, ne internus eius impediatur aspectus,*"<sup>1</sup>—if we use "*mundana*" as meaning not everything which belongs to this world, but as worldly things so mishandled and loved as to draw us from God—might apply to both these poets, and to many, at any rate, of the Saints. But à Kempis goes further in another passage where he is describing the Mystics' vision: "*Sunt alii, qui intellectu illuminati et affectu*

<sup>1</sup> "De Imitatione Christi," Book III., chapter v.: "Love wills to be free, and estranged from all worldly affection, that so its inward sight may not be hindered."

*purgati ad aeterna semper anhelant, de terrenis graviter audiunt, necessitatibus naturæ dolenter inserviunt; et hi sentiunt, quid spiritus veritatis loquitur in iis. Quia docet eos terrena despicere et amare cælestia, mundum negligere et cælum tota die ac nocte desiderare.*"<sup>1</sup>

This is not approximately true of Wordsworth; it is not entirely true of Vaughan. It might be said that the light which came to Wordsworth reached him, almost wholly, certainly overwhelmingly, through the beauty of the natural world. He seemed to "see" quite differently from the saints, and yet to see far more than his unheeding generation; escaping, as they were, with so much difficulty from the chill eighteenth century. Like these latter, he looked out at the world of sensible things, and while he was looking phenomena gave place to noumena, the appearance to the shining reality behind, underneath, above.

Perhaps the first thought which arises when we look at Haydon's portrait of him is that here is a man who "saw." Reflection and feeling, no doubt, are there; but vision, and that not merely physical, nor superficial, nor of

<sup>1</sup> "De Imit," Book III., chapter iv.: "Others there are who, being illuminated in their understandings, and purged in their affection, do always pant after things eternal, are unwilling to hear of earthly things, and do serve the necessities of nature with grief; and these perceive what the Spirit of Truth speaketh in them, for He teacheth them to despise earthly, and to love heavenly things; to neglect the world, and to desire Heaven all the day and night."

obviously palpable objects, is the salient characteristic of the face. The bent head and unalterable gaze suggest the power to see what is hidden, what is behind or beneath.

Vaughan stands between the purer Mystics and Wordsworth. The latter is really a great example of what Dr Bucke called "cosmic consciousness," though he carefully warns us against supposing that this is a homogeneous state: "all cases of cosmic consciousness are not on the same plane."<sup>1</sup>

Two claims Dr Bucke makes for this state, which will, perhaps, not be universally allowed. He urges that it is sudden in onset. If this be so how are we to account for those to whom the whole world has always seemed alive and vibrant with half-veiled meaning; who can, by no means, point like Pascal, for example, to a certain day and say: "There and then I felt the sudden advent of flame-lit conviction." Again Dr Bucke is inclined to fix the illuminated age between thirty and forty. He even goes so far as to say: "Should we hear of a case of cosmic consciousness occurring at twenty, for instance, we should at first doubt the truth of the account, and if forced to believe it, we should expect the man (if he lived) to prove himself in some way a spiritual giant."<sup>2</sup> This seems far too rigid an attitude towards that which, after all, is so fluid—human experience. Did not

<sup>1</sup> "Cosmic Consciousness," page 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 62.



Wordsworth himself warn us against this very thing, asking that most pertinent question :

“ . . . But who shall parcel out  
His intellect by geometric rules,  
Split like a province into round and square?  
Who knows the individual hour in which  
His habits were first sown even as a seed? ”<sup>1</sup>

Who indeed? This is in the vein of that other poem wherein he once condemned the folly of those who would fain measure and appraise

“ Each little drop of wisdom as it falls  
Into the dimpling cistern of the heart.”

Moreover, something of the kind was clearly observable in the early youth of Berkeley, of Wordsworth himself, and of Newman. Some of us may think these “ spiritual giants,” but two of them, at any rate, Dr Bucke does not include, and the third only half grudgingly. The passage in Newman’s “ Apologia ” is well known : “ I thought life might be a dream or I an angel, and all this world a deception, my fellow-angels by a playful device concealing themselves from me and deceiving me with a semblance of a material world.”<sup>2</sup>

When he was an undergraduate at Trinity College, Dublin, Berkeley kept a commonplace book. This has been published. On one page by themselves are a few sentences, of which the following form part : “ From my childhood I

<sup>1</sup> “ The Prelude,” book ii.

<sup>2</sup> “ The Apologia,” chapter i. By J. H. Newman.

had an unaccountable turn of thought that way. *Mem.*—That I was distrustful at eight years old, and consequently by nature disposed for these new doctrines.”

The sentence in the commonplace book immediately preceding the first of these is: “He that would bring another over to his opinion must seem to harmonise with him at first and humour him in his own way of talking.”

But in an earlier sentence on the same page Berkeley refers to “my speculations.” That term, with the later “*Mem.*” seems to indicate that Berkeley was really referring to his whole view of philosophy (of which on page 455 of the commonplace book he had written, “To be eternally banishing metaphysics and recalling men to common sense,” glossed by his editor as calling them “away from abstractions, and through reflection to concrete reality in its constant relation to living spirit); and it seems to suggest that his youthful “distrustfulness” was but the early germ of his later mature view of the “sensible” world.<sup>1</sup>

These apprehensions of Berkeley and Newman cannot in strictness be called illumination, yet of both it might be held that they perceived “reality” where others beheld only abstractions.

It would be difficult indeed to point to any “sudden onset” of illumination in Wordsworth’s case; at any rate in boyhood he shared

<sup>1</sup> “Life, Letters, and Unpublished Writings of George Berkeley.” *Vide* pages 10, 455, 501, and 502. Edited by Alexander Campbell Fraser, 1861.

Newman's experience of the possible unreality of the material world, for he says: "Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or a tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality." This is not illumination proper, but it seems to imply an unusual sense of the reality of the unseen world; though possibly less uncommon than we think, even among English people, whose real experiences, owing to their temperamental reticences, are very hard to diagnose.

There can, however, be no manner of doubt that Wordsworth believed firmly in the interconnexion of the immaterial and material worlds. This does not necessarily involve any degree of illumination, though it may prepare the way for it. This belief inspires the opening pages of "The Prelude":

"I, methought, while the sweet breath of Heaven  
Was blowing on my body, felt within  
A correspondent breeze."

More confidently still he writes:

"Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music; there is a dark,  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society."

What is that but the same creed which finds its further exposition in "The Recluse"?

"—Beauty—a living Presence of the Earth,  
Surpassing the most fair ideal forms  
Which craft of delicate spirits hath composed  
From Earth's materials—waits upon my steps;  
Pitches her tents before me as I move,

An hourly neighbour. Paradise, and groves  
 Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old  
 Sought in the Atlantic Main—why should they be  
 A history only of departed things  
 Or a mere fiction of what never was?  
 For the discerning intellect of Man,  
 When wedded to this goodly universe  
 In love and holy passion, shall find there  
 A simple produce of the common day.

—I, long before the blissful hour arrives,  
 Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse  
 Of this great consummation:—and by words  
 Which speak of nothing more than what we are,  
 Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep  
 Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain  
 To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims  
 How exquisitely the individual Mind  
 (And the progressive powers no less  
 Of the whole species), to the External World  
 Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too—  
 Theme this but little heard of among men—  
 The external World is fitted to the Mind.”

This high kind of pre-arranged harmony has not, properly speaking, any mystical element in it. But the same poem, elsewhere, clearly testifies to Wordsworth's consciousness of and belief in illumination. Once he speaks of himself as:

“The transitory being that beheld  
 This vision,”

and twice in fine apostrophes he craves sight:

“Descend, prophetic Spirit! that inspir’st  
 The human Soul of universal earth  
 Dreaming on things to come; and dost possess  
 A metropolitan temple in the hearts  
 Of mighty poets: upon me bestow  
 A gift of genuine insight.”

More definitely still, a few lines on, he calls to the

“ . . . dread Power  
Whose gracious favour is the primal source  
Of all illumination.”

The most casual student of Wordsworth is probably aware of his view of essential harmony between humanity and the world of material things, a view perfectly plain in the lines just quoted from “The Recluse.” He goes further, and penetrates to that more individual, more intimate harmony between every human being (as a unique personality) and his environment in the lines—lines which he cited and thus emphasised in his preface to the “Excursion,”

“ . . . That which each man loved  
And prized in his peculiar nook of earth  
Dies with him, or is changed.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr Bucke, who can bestow but one page of his book on this man whom he describes as “nearly, if not quite, a poet,” only refers to and quotes from one of Wordsworth’s poems, the well-known “Lines composed above Tintern Abbey.” He quotes two passages, viz. the twelve lines following the one which speaks of “the burden of the mystery,” and the ten beginning

“ . . . I have felt  
A presence . . . ”

He ascribes the first to “the relief . . . which belongs to the unrisen sun of the cosmic

<sup>1</sup> “Excursion,” book i.

sense," and the second to "the mental condition which may be properly called the twilight of cosmic consciousness."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he commits himself to the surprising statement: "There is no evidence that upon him, at any time, the sun actually rose—that the veil was ever rent and the splendour let through; in fact it may be considered as quite clear that this did not happen."<sup>2</sup>

Even if, supposing so amazing a thing as that Wordsworth had written nothing but "Tintern Abbey," we should hesitate to endorse this judgment, certainly acquiescence in it becomes impossible in the face of that great mass of poems which he wrote between 1787 and 1805. Even those who would not, as Mr Morley apparently does, "accept the critical dictum that all his good work was done in the decade between 1798 and 1808," will still allow that a great part of his best work was done then; though they will find outside those ten years more work of a high order than the one exception admitted by Mr Morley, the "Ode composed on an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty," which belongs to 1820.

What Dr Bucke means, the student of Wordsworth cannot conjecture; for it is impossible to suppose that this American psychologist confined his attention to one single poem. As a matter of fact, it would appear that even a superficial acquaintance with those which one would

<sup>1</sup> "Cosmic Consciousness," pages 236, 237.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 236.

expect to be familiar to all educated people would stop such hasty judgments.

Mr Morley tells us that "in the handbooks of familiar quotations Wordsworth fills more space than anybody else, save Shakespeare and Pope."<sup>1</sup> That being so, if there be a Wordsworth quotation which we all know, surely it is that confession from "The Prelude" about his boyhood:

" . . . Even then I felt  
Gleams like the flashing of a shield—the earth  
And common face of Nature spake to me  
Rememberable things,"<sup>2</sup>

a passage which not only declares that his youth was not devoid of illumination, but implies a fuller measure of it as the years passed on.

The claim to illumination in boyhood may be further established by the well-known lines from Michael:

" . . . while I was yet a boy  
Careless of books, yet having felt the power of  
Nature."

If there be one of his poems which almost invariably finds its way into the Anthologies, is it not "Expostulation and Reply"—with Matthew's familiar exhortation?—

" The eye—it cannot choose but see,  
We cannot bid the ear be still;  
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,  
Against or with our will.

" Nor less I dream that there are Powers  
Which of themselves our minds impress."

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<sup>1</sup> "The Complete Works of William Wordsworth with an Introduction by John Morley," page 60.

<sup>2</sup> "The Prelude," book i., lines 585 *et seq.*

The very next poem to it, one so universally known that it is impossible to believe Dr Bucke to be ignorant of it, declares even more plainly the fact of the possibility of illumination. We need not rely on the verse which Mr Morley once dismissed with scathing, if undeserved, criticism, but what about the lines,

"Come forth into the light of things  
 Let Nature be your teacher.  
 . . . . .  
 Come forth and bring with you a heart  
 That watches and receives."

Surely here we have, so clearly that the hastiest could not miss it, the Mystic's illumination in the Mystic's atmosphere of love. Perhaps, in these pleasure-loving days, the very title of the "Ode to Duty" debars people from reading it; but the closing line can hardly have faded wholly from memory:

"In the light of Truth thy bondman let me live."

Then there is that poem written in 1833—when the happy decade declared by Mr Morley to have seen his best work had passed away—"On a High Part of the Coast of Cumberland," and it contains these suggestive lines:

"Teach me with quick-eared spirit to rejoice  
 In admonition of Thy softest voice."

That is aural illumination, if the mixed image may be allowed; anyhow, it is no reference to external ears. Nor can we forget the "After-



thought," appended to the "Duddon Sonnets," with its gallant creed:

"Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent  
dower

We feel that we are greater than we know."

If that does not place us in any actual region of illumination it surrounds us with the mystical atmosphere, wherein anything may happen.

And then we recall those lines from "Brougham Castle," which tell how Clifford's "teachers" had been

"The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

If there be two lines filled to overflowing with the Wordsworthian sense of occult, yet apprehended, powers, streaming down, upon, and over and into the responsive soul, surely these are they. If people cannot spontaneously grasp their meaning, talk is idle and explanation futile. After all, a person is illuminated or he is not. There surely cannot be a half-way house in this matter? One who is will grasp the meaning of "Nature's old felicities,"<sup>1</sup> as Wordsworth did; and he who is not must go without that comprehension.

Perhaps before we consider the matter as it appears in two of Wordsworth's greatest poems, it is worth while to remember the lines which Coleridge addressed to him:

" . . . thy soul received  
The light reflected, as a light bestowed."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The Trosachs."

<sup>2</sup> "Sybilline Leaves."

And again :

“ Truth

Not learnt, but native, her own natural notes.”

In estimating, in trying to appreciate the innermost essence of Wordsworth's real attitude, “The Prelude” must always come first. It is not that the minor poems do not exemplify most vividly, most beautifully, the texture of his thought; enough has already been quoted to remind us that they do. But “The Prelude” was Wordsworth's deliberate effort to trace his own inner growth. Even if one may believe that a writer may sometimes let *la vraie vérité* escape concerning one subject when he is ostensibly treating another, yet it is a gratuitous impertinence to pay less than the closest attention to his intentional, considered handling of the matter. If there be one impression more indelibly graven on the reader's mind than another by that

“ Song divine of high and passionate thoughts,”

it surely is the poet's immense debt to Nature as a formative, most truly educating force. No one acquainted with Wordsworth's poems, and not least among them, from this point of view, with “The Prelude,” and who also has shared in any degree in the same kind of experience, can possibly doubt that for him the

“ World as God has made it,”

i.e. the world of wild and practically unaltered country, is actually, irrevocably filled with a

Real Presence. Amidst the beauty, more or less obvious and attractive to everyone, of the natural world, the informing Loveliness behind calls to Wordsworth; nor is it only Loveliness: living Being, Power are there too. The lines:

“ Ye Presences of Nature in the sky,  
And on the Earth! Ye Visions of the hills!  
And Souls of lonely places! ”

are well enough known to be called, alas! hackneyed. But just before them Wordsworth has recorded an experience, and that a childish experience—his own boyhood's, of course—which is perhaps one of the most haunting descriptions of that sense of life, power, being, only just veiled by the physical world, of which many, besides Wordsworth, are, or have been, or will be aware, even if they lack the power of expression to convey the reality to others:

“ One summer evening (led by her <sup>1</sup>) I found  
A little boat tied to a willow tree  
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.  
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in  
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth  
And troubled pleasure; not without the voice  
Of mountain echoes did my boat move on;  
Leaving behind her still, on either side,  
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,  
Until they melted all into one track  
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,  
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point  
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view  
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,  
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. by Nature.

Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.  
 She was an elfin pinnace; lustily  
 I dipped my oars into the silent lake,  
 And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat  
 Went heaving through the water like a swan;  
 When, from behind that craggy steep, till then  
 The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,  
 As if with voluntary power instinct  
 Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,  
 And growing still in stature the grim shape  
 Towered up between me and the stars, and still,  
 For so it seemed, with purpose of its own  
 And measured motion like a living thing,  
 Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned  
 And through the silent water stole my way  
 Back to the covert of the willow tree.  
 There is her mooring-place I left my bark."

I spoke above of this sense of Being dawning on a mortal who, like Wordsworth, moved principally in the "world as God has made it." Perhaps the capacity is carried to a still higher power, at any rate to a rarer, more uncommon power for those who can detect this hidden Presence behind that sorrier world which is as man has marred it. This is not an unknown case. One might remember Mrs Meynell's beautiful lines:

"O heavenly colour, London town  
 Has blurred it from her skies;  
 And hooded in an earthly brown  
 Unheaven'd the city lies.

"But when the gold and silver lamps  
 Colour the London dew,  
 And misted by the winter damps  
 The shops shine bright anew—

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<sup>1</sup> "The Prelude," book i., lines 357 *et seq.*

Blue comes to earth, it walks the street,  
It dyes the wide air through;  
A mimic sky about their feet,  
The throng go crowned with blue."<sup>1</sup>

Even more triumphantly perhaps than in these wonderful lines of delicate penetration did Francis Thompson discover beneath the sordid squalor of city life the abiding things of Eternity, and imprisoned them in the poem found after his death among his papers:

"O world invisible, we view thee,  
O world intangible, we touch thee,  
O world unknowable, we know thee,  
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

"The angels keep their ancient places;  
Turn but a stone and start a wing!  
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,  
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

"But when so sad, thou canst not sadder  
Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss  
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder,  
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

"Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,  
Cry—clinging Heaven by the hems,  
And to Christ walking on the water  
Not of Gennesareth but Thames."

Wordsworth was almost entirely, if not absolutely, devoid of this form of insight; for in spite of the opening lines of his "Sonnet Composed on Westminster Bridge," the vision is due to reflection and comparison, not to illumination. But placed in the midst of his dearly loved

<sup>1</sup> "Collected Poems," page 72.

Cumbrian land, familiar to him from of old, and sacred from numberless happenings, none could easily outstrip him in that peculiar form of illumination which conveys the reality behind the apparent. The most hasty reader must notice Wordsworth's sensitiveness to *sound*, and the spiritual significance it had for him. "The Prelude" is full of it; the three following instances, though each differs from the other two, occur in close proximity:

". . . Was it for this  
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved  
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,  
And from his alder shades and rocky falls,  
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice  
That flowed along my dreams? For this, didst thou,  
O Derwent! winding among grassy holms  
Where I was looking on a babe in arms,  
Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts  
To more than infant softness, giving me  
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind  
A foretaste, a dim earnest of the calm  
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves."<sup>1</sup>

The second instance relates the fact that as a boy, alone on the moor at night, he once stole a woodcock out of another boy's trap:

". . . the bird  
Which was the captive of another's toil  
Became my prey—"

and tells how then at once he was himself the

<sup>1</sup> "The Prelude," book i., lines 269 *et seq.*

prey of Power, unseen, intangible, but very definitely heard, if only with the inner ear:

" . . . when the deed was done  
I heard among the solitary hills  
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds  
Of undistinguishable motion, steps  
Almost as silent as the turf they trod."<sup>1</sup>

More suggestive still, because sight and hearing are both involved, are the lines close by, describing his hazardous quest, among rocky places, after the raven's nest:

" . . . oh, at that time  
While on the perilous ridge, I hung alone,  
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind  
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky  
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds  
to escape."<sup>2</sup>

It is possible that Wordsworth may have possessed physical hearing acuter than normal—a possession which, in his circumstances of country life, might be a blessing, but which is not precisely that in this modern age of ceaseless noise. That he was abnormally alert is suggested by the beautiful lines:

" Catching from tufts of grass and harebell flowers  
Their faintest whisper to the passing breeze."<sup>3</sup>

No one but a solitary wanderer of heightened apprehension would dream of such a possibility. Yet it should be an actual fact for those who will

<sup>1</sup> "The Prelude," book i., lines 321 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, book i., lines 330 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, book vi., lines 221, 222.

listen—for people, for example, who are not too dense to catch the bat's tenuous cry in the gloom of twilight.

While Wordsworth was a boy his delight, we know, was to steal away alone, to escape from the natural noise and racket of his fellows, which one side of him enjoyed in the most wholesome fashion, into peace and stillness. It is true that there is one passage in "The Prelude" where he admits the possibility that he may have been over-addicted to loneliness:

" I was taught to feel perhaps too much  
The self-sufficing power of solitude."<sup>1</sup>

Yet this admission is balanced by the definite statement in an earlier poem:

" . . . impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude."<sup>2</sup>

And again:

" When from our better selves we have too long  
Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop  
Sick of its business, of its pleasures tired.  
How gracious, how benign is Solitude;  
How potent a mere image of her sway;

. . . as the soul of that great Power is met  
Sometimes embodied on a public road,  
When, for the night deserted it assumes  
A character of quiet more profound  
Than pathless wastes."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Prelude," book ii., lines 76, 77.

<sup>2</sup> "A Poet's Epitaph."

<sup>3</sup> "The Prelude," book iv., lines 354 *et seq.*



During his residence at Cambridge, amid the multifarious interests of undergraduate life, not over-harassed, one somehow imagines, by

“ . . . important days,  
Examinations, when the man was weighed  
As in a balance,”

amidst all that he can still cry,

“ . . . all  
That I beheld respired with inward meaning.”<sup>1</sup>

Cambridge, as Wordsworth knew it, can scarcely be called a town; even still, it deserves the apostrophe:

“ O fairest of all fair places,  
Sweetest of all sweet towns.”<sup>2</sup>

And that surely he must have found it, since he could write:

“ As, if awakened, summoned, roused, constrained,  
I looked for universal things; perused  
The common countenance of earth and sky;  
Earth nowhere unembellished by some trace  
Of that first Paradise whence man was driven;  
And sky whose beauty and bounty are expressed  
By the proud name she bears—the name of Heaven.  
I called on both to teach me what they might;  
Or, turning the mind in upon herself,  
Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my  
thoughts  
And spread them with a wider creeping; felt  
Incumbencies more awful, visitings

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<sup>1</sup> “The Prelude,” book iii., lines 131, 132.

<sup>2</sup> “A Minor Poet,” page 86. By Amy Levy.

Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul  
 That tolerates the indignities of Time,  
 And from the centre of Eternity  
 All finite motions overruling, lives  
 In glory immutable."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, if we follow this intimate record of Wordsworth's life, if we watch him taking up, one by one, the old ways, dropping into the old habits, in his first Long Vacation, when he went home for the first time from Cambridge to the

" . . . bed of Windermere  
 Like a vast river stretching in the sun,"

then the truth of the contention, already advanced, that the real source of Wordsworth's illumination is the country, not the town, will become apparent:

"The sun was set, or setting  
 . . . . .  
 . . . Gently did my soul  
 Put off her veil, and, self transmuted, stood  
 Naked as in the presence of her God."<sup>2</sup>

If that be not illumination, then what is it? The lines which follow convey the deepening of the experience in the mystical atmosphere, love:

"While on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch  
 A heart that had not been disconsolate.  
 Strength came where weakness was not known  
 to be,  
 At least not felt; and restoration came  
 Like an intruder knocking at the door  
 Of unacknowledged weariness."

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<sup>1</sup> "The Prelude," book iii., lines 105 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, book iv., lines 142 *et seq.*

I hardly think that the closing lines of the seventh book of "The Prelude"—"Residence in London"—really traverse this view, although there he wrote:

"This did I feel in London's vast domain.  
The spirit of Nature was upon me there;  
The soul of Beauty and enduring Life,  
Vouchsafed her inspiration, and diffused  
Through meagre lines and colours, and the press  
Of self-destroying, transitory things,  
Composure and ennobling harmony,"

But all which preceded those lines in the seventh book gives a totally different impression. The most convincing passage that Wordsworth was not wholly unaware of the same Real Presence even behind and beneath the disastrous bustle and soul-killing vulgarity of great cities, occurs in the eighth book:

"London, to thee I willingly return.  
Ere while my verse played idly with the flowers  
Enwrought upon thy mantle.

. . . . .

. . . on the roof

Of an itinerant vehicle I sate,  
With vulgar men about me, trivial forms  
Of houses, pavement, streets, of men and things—  
Mean shapes on every side; but at the instant,  
When to myself it fairly might be said  
The threshold now is overpast (how strange  
That aught external to the living mind  
Should have such mighty sway! yet so it was),  
A weight of ages did at once descend  
Upon my heart; no thought embodied, no  
Distinct remembrances, but weight and power—

Power growing under weight : alas ! I feel  
 That I am trifling : 'twas a moment's pause—  
 All that took place within me came and went  
 As in a moment ; yet with Time it dwells  
 And grateful memory, as a thing divine."<sup>1</sup>

Beneath the pompous verbosity and painful self-consciousness of this passage, which is, no doubt, Wordsworth in his most jejune and tiresome mood, there is a flash of transient illumination.

Truth compels us to allow, however, that there was for him a source of illumination distinct from the beauty of the country ; and this he found in pure as distinguished from applied science. Those who can in any way appreciate the rare pleasure to be derived from the absolute certainty here and now of the conclusions of pure mathematics will find nothing ludicrous or even surprising in the following passage :

" More frequently from the same source I drew  
 A pleasure quiet and profound, a sense  
 Of permanent and universal sway  
 And paramount belief ; there, recognised  
 A type, for finite natures, of the one  
 Supreme Existence, the surpassing life  
 Which—to the boundaries of space and time,  
 Superior and incapable of change,  
 Nor touched by welterings of passion—is  
 And hath the name of God. Transcendent peace  
 And silence did avail upon these thoughts  
 That were a frequent comfort to my youth."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> " The Prelude," book viii., lines 532 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, book vi., lines 129 *et seq.*

No doubt it would be easy to make merry about a man's passage from Euclid to illumination, but in this case it would be quite unfair. Wordsworth deliberately interposes the link of "Nature's laws": he travels from

"The pleasures gathered from the rudiments  
Of geometric science,"

to another region, where he moves

"From star to star, from kindred sphere to sphere,  
From system on to system without end."

What the great laws of the material heavens conveyed to him we know from his lines on the compelling statue of Newton, which, in the ante-chapel of Trinity, draws all men to gaze into those dreaming, far-away eyes:

"Newton with his prism and silent face,  
The marble index of a mind for ever  
Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone."<sup>1</sup>

Nor is he alone in this kind of attitude, though the classical phrase of Immanuel Kant, "the starry sky above me and the moral law within me," is so familiar that one hardly dares to quote it. Yet, in conclusion, it must be admitted that Wordsworth himself seems to have no sustained belief in the source of his illumination; he oscillates perpetually between one opinion and

<sup>1</sup>"The Prelude," book iii., lines 61-63.

another. After the extraordinarily beautiful description of

“ The clear presence of the full-orbed moon ”

seen from the heights of Snowdon, he speaks of Nature

“ . . . putting forth

That mutual domination which she loves  
To exert upon the face of outward things,  
So moulded, joined, abstracted, so endowed  
With interchangeable supremacy,  
That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive  
And cannot choose but feel.”<sup>1</sup>

A little further on he writes as if this capacity of illumined vision, “ spiritual love ” he calls it, were a kind of amalgam of capacities developed in some men by use and deliberate cultivation; he speaks of it almost as an empirical psychologist might:

“ This spiritual Love acts not nor can exist  
Without Imagination, which in truth  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood.  
This faculty hath been the feeding source  
Of our long labour; we have traced the stream  
From the blind cavern whence is faintly heard  
Its natal murmur; followed it to light  
And open day: accompanied its course  
Among the ways of Nature, for a time  
Lost sight of it, bewildered and engulfed;  
Then given it greeting as it rose once more  
In strength, reflecting from its placid breast

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<sup>1</sup> “ The Prelude,” book xiv., lines 79 *et seq.*

The works of man, and face of human life;  
 And lastly, from its progress have we drawn  
 Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought  
 Of human Being, Eternity and God."

And then there are the lines in "The Recluse," quoted earlier, where, having referred to himself as

"The transitory being that beheld  
 This Vision,"

he invokes the

"... dread Power  
 Whose gracious favour is the primal source  
 Of all illumination."

The whole tenor of his work inclines one to the belief that this latter view was his real conviction. Probably the oft-quoted lines, possibly more widely known than any others he ever wrote, represent his most settled as also his most comprehensive view:

"Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe!  
 Thou Soul that art the Eternity of thought,  
 That givest to forms and images a breath  
 And everlasting motion, not in vain.  
 By day or star-light thus from my first dawn  
 Of childhood didst Thou intertwine for me  
 The passions that build up our human soul;  
 Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,  
 But with high objects, with enduring things—  
 With life and nature—purifying thus  
 The elements of feeling and of thought,  
 And sanctifying, by such discipline,  
 Both pain and fear, until we recognise

---

"The Prelude," book xiv., lines 188 *et seq.*

A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.  
Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me  
With stinted kindness."<sup>1</sup>

However that may be, there is confusion of exposition in Wordsworth, a confusion not exhibited by the other poets here considered.

<sup>1</sup> "The Prelude," book i., lines 401 *et seq.*



## ROBERT BROWNING

BARON FRIEDRICH VON HÜGEL, in his learned and supremely suggestive book, "The Mystical Element of Religion," refers to the not uncommon opinion that metaphysics lend no support to religion. He quotes the following sufficiently startling passage from Professor Wilhelm Hermann: "There exists no Theory of Knowledge for such things as we hold to be real in the strength of faith. In such religious affirmation the believer demolishes every bridge between his conviction and that which Science can recognise as real."<sup>1</sup>

He adds of Hermann and of his master, Albert Ritschl, that "Metaphysics of any and every kind appear everywhere to both writers as essentially unnecessary, unreal, misleading, so much inflation and delusion of soul."<sup>2</sup> Baron von Hügel notes that it is not only among philosophers that these opinions obtain. He writes: "Many men of sense and goodness come to speak as though religion, even at its fullest, could and should get on without either, content-

<sup>1</sup> "The Mystical Element of Religion," vol. ii., page 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii., page 269.

ing itself to be a somewhat sentimental Immanent Ethics."<sup>1</sup>

Such a sweeping statement as Professor Hermann's is robbed of much of its apparently devastating force to the person who sees that the Human Sciences are not overwhelmingly concerned with "that which Science can recognise as real." The pretensions of "Science" can sometimes become a little over-swollen, the delimitations of it imperfectly drawn. It is not wholly fortunate that so many scientists have, at any rate, seemed to fail to see that "reality" may be of more than one kind, and reached by more means than the ordinary methods of the positive sciences.

It cannot be necessary to say, so ever more widely known are his writings coming to be, that Baron von Hügel does not share Professor Hermann's views; and his counter-claim against such statements is of the most convincing nature of all, as he simply recalls, as a matter of historical fact, readily provable, "the procession so largely made up of men and movements not usually reckoned as exclusively or directly religious, whose very greatness—one which humanity will not let die—is closely interwoven with mystical and metaphysical affirmations. There are," so he reminds us, "among philosophers, a Spinoza and a Leibniz, a Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer, a Trendelenberg and a Lotze, with the later stages of a John Mill, a

<sup>1</sup>"The Mystical Element of Religion," vol. ii., page 271.

Litré and a Herbert Spencer; among poets, a Pindar and Æschylus, a Lucretius and Virgil, a Lessing and a Goethe, a Wordsworth and a Browning; among historians, a Thucydides and a Tacitus, a St. Simon and de Tocqueville, a Carlyle, a Jakob Grimm, a Droysen and a Ranke; among scientists, a Copernicus and a Kepler, a Newton, a Lyell, indeed, largely still, also a Darwin; and among men of action, a Moltke and a Gordon, a Burke and a von Stein."<sup>1</sup>

This interesting suggestion that mysticism and philosophy contribute vital elements to so many of the greatest movements, are essentially characteristic of so many of the greatest men, is closed and clinched by the striking challenge: "Shear any of these men of their Mystical and Metaphysical elements and you will have shorn Samson of his locks."

That Browning was a Metaphysical poet is a statement which has been repeated *ad nauseam*, and not seldom by people who seemed to apprehend as little of the real nature of poetry as of that of metaphysics. While Baron von Hügel's statement that Wordsworth was a mystical poet will be admitted, as I have tried to show, in greater or less degree by most critics, his plea that Browning's poetry contains a vein of mysticism may be less readily conceded, even by those who dwell with severest emphasis on his obscurity, a quality which some people seem to reckon as one and the same thing with mysticism.

<sup>1</sup> "The Mystical Element of Religion," vol. ii., page 271.

The real difficulty centres always round the exact precise meaning of this elusive word. The view advanced in the preceding pages is that it is a way of knowledge not dependent on discursive reasoning but on immediate experience, and that the atmosphere in which it develops may and actually does range from desire to ardent love.

M. Joly, quoting the Abbé Huvelin, tells us that "le mysticisme c'est l'amour de Dieu," which he calls, "cette définition la plus simple et la plus claire de toutes."<sup>1</sup> This is doubtless true, but must not be confounded with the converse of the proposition, since we can nowise admit that all love of God is mystical. M. Joly urges this, and without any shadow of hesitation writes: "Non, tous les mystiques ne sont pas saints . . . tous les saints ne sont pas mystiques."

Mysticism then is direct vision operating in an atmosphere of love; the Mystic, kindling with ardour, beholding things steadfastly, "sees" immediately without any intervening medium whatever; is really illuminated. Upon his face, as Festus said to Paracelsus, is

". . . that look

As if where'er you gazed there stood a star ! "

We must not exaggerate in the case of Browning, but recollect that Baron von Hügel goes no further than to attribute a mystical *element* to each one of the great men whose names he cites; though he certainly implies the importance, the scope of this element, by his compari-

<sup>1</sup> "Psychologie des Saints," page 40.

son of Samson's locks. In studying Browning's poems then, the student need not expect to find a mighty Mystic; we shall not think of him as in the same great category as S. John of the Cross or Ruysbroeck; and, to put it on a far lower plane, we shall not find in him quite that temperamental tendency to mysticism, that in-born way of coming at occult truth through the phenomenal world which distinguished Wordsworth. In Browning there was an ineradicable vein of ratiocination, twined up with another, hardly less marked, of speculation. Side by side with these was that leaning towards the solution of any human problem according to its dramatic elements, which nothing could obliterate from his work, and which he very seldom forced down into even a subordinate place. It must be admitted that his plays have been seldom staged, that "Strafford" with its great tragic scene, not unworthy of Shakspeare, was reckoned a failure; but for all that, so ingrained was his dramatic feeling that he could not exclude it from his lyrics.

All these qualities, sometimes singly, sometimes in union, attenuated his capacity for direct vision. His indefatigable desire to pull things into their component parts sometimes delayed, sometimes impeded his power to see them as a whole, intuitively. Then, and specially if Browning be under consideration, it is never permissible to overlook the vast distinction which obtains between religious and philosophical intuition. There are mysteries of philosophy as

well as of religion. The essence of this "way" of knowledge lies, since it is "a way," in its method. Dr Inge once wrote that "the essence of mysticism is not speculation but intuition."<sup>1</sup> The *differentia* is found in the fact that the method of the Mystic is immediate, experiential not discursive, i.e. not dependent on a train of reasoning. The philosopher, no less than the religious teacher, is, or may be, conscious of intuited knowledge. Baron von Hügel, as is now well known, has drawn a careful distinction between morality, mysticism, philosophy and religion, and he explicitly says that he thinks of mysticism "as with intellectualism and moralism, one of the three psychological forms of religion, which are each legitimate and necessary, and which each require the check of the other two."<sup>2</sup> It is greatly to be regretted that so many writers fail to see this necessary balance; and thus we find some overrating reason, others exalting intuition above all the rest of our powers.

Intellectualism, as a form of religion, that is religious truth pursued by means of discursive reason, which is more properly called theology, was singularly consonant with Browning's genius. Of course it is true often that the same conclusion may be reached by discursive reasoning or by intuition. For example, when in the

<sup>1</sup> "Bampton Lectures"—Christian Mysticism, page 338. By W. R. Inge.

<sup>2</sup> "The Mystical Element of Religion," vol. ii., page 268.

"Gorgias" Plato observes: "to do is worse than to suffer injustice," it is obvious to the most casual reader that he has proceeded to this judgment by a perfectly rational, strictly logical argument, based on the fundamental principles of ethics; his process is dialectical to the "nth," if one may so express it. None the less, the same conclusion is possible to the Mystic, to the man who does not proceed slowly step by step, from arduous reason to reason, but who "sees" instantly, as he looks into this tangle which men call life. For, undoubtedly, to the "just man" even in the moment when the agony is keenest of enduring the cruel consequences of other men's ill-doing, since their way is made so easy—

". . . there's a real love of a lie  
Liars find ready made for lies they make"—

of their injustice, or rapacity, or baseless jealousy, their intrigue or moral cowardice, their sheer stupid tattling, or whatever their crime be, there is, or may be, an immediate consciousness, a conviction based on insight proper, that it is, in actual fact, whatever the bitterness of the pain, better to suffer than to do injustice. Such a conclusion can be reached by logical process, yet to some, undoubtedly, it is an intuition, not only needing no argument, but being to them provable by no conceivable argument, or collocation of arguments, stronger than their own conviction.

There are many cases where Browning evi-

1 "Mr Sludge the Medium."

dently preferred the method of intellectualism. All through his life he seems to have been immensely engrossed with religious problems, and between 1850 and 1855 he tackled them mainly by reason, for it is to this period that "Men and Women," "Christmas Eve," and "Easter Day" belong, though "Easter Day" bears traces of mysticism irradiating its rationalism. Yet this latter poem must not stand quite alone, for in the preface to "Men and Women," i.e. in the poem called "Transcendentalism," we come upon the reference to "German Boehme," and his sudden awareness

"That plants could speak,"

and again, further on to John of Halberstadt,

"Who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about,"

the man who

"Buries us with a glory, young once more,  
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life,"

and so we have conclusive proof that, as ever, so at this early stage, Browning was well aware of the possibility of intuition. The same attitude is apparent in "Karshish" in the question:

"How can he give his neighbour the real ground  
His own conviction?"

But while there are these flashings of direct vision, yet it is among these "Men and Women" that we find "Cleon," that crystallisation of hopelessness, however real for a time



beauty may be, however keenly it may be appreciated. And further, among them is "Blougram," the typical instance surely of "reasoned" morality and religion. That it approaches, perhaps touches, casuistry, only proves that it is absolutely antipodean to the mystical, intuitive, immediate method of seizing upon truth. It is undeniable that Blougram rises to his own height:

" All's doubt in me; where's break of faith in this?  
It is the idea, the feeling and the love,  
God means mankind should strive for and show forth  
Whatever be the process to the end—  
And not historic knowledge, logic sound  
And metaphysical acumen, sure!  
' What think ye of Christ,' friend? when all's done  
and said,  
Like you this Christianity or not?  
It may be false, but will you wish it true?  
Has it your vote to be so if it can?

All the same his height is not that of mysticism. The Mystic does not "think of," but knows Christ. He does not ask if he "like" Christianity, nor does he "wish" it to be true, since he is convinced that it is. This goodwill is, no doubt, able to furnish an element in that atmosphere of desire and finally of love into which the vision shall some day flash; but Blougram, with all his strange attraction, is still a reasoner, not a seer.

Between five-and-twenty and thirty years after, Browning returns to this discursive method, as, in "Ivàn Ivànovitch," he sets forth the ingeni-

ous arguing of the tiresome Starosta. In that same poem he gives us an excellent example of reasoned ethics based on religion in the parish priest's homily. Suddenly, in startling contrast to both, to the rationalised morality of the Starosta, and the priest's religious ethics, there flashes in upon the dreadful scene that direct intuition of righteousness, that mystical seizure on truth of Ivàn himself, whose swift blow with the axe, whose almost scornful question as

"They told him he was free

As air to walk abroad. 'How otherwise?' asked he—"

comes like a justification of George Tyrrell's daring assertion: "Religion . . . cares nothing for the affairs of the mind, nor even for ethical propriety of conduct save as an expression and instrument of the life of the spirit, as furthering union with the Divine Will."<sup>1</sup> And that is precisely the Mystic's view.

Half-way between the laborious train of reasoning offered by Blougram to Gigadibs, and the flash of Ivàn's immediate vision of truth, there is an early poem, published among the "Dramatic Romances" in 1849, which Browning's readers have sometimes misunderstood. The solution of the misunderstanding surely is that they have missed this element of intuitive, immediate, mystical grasp. The poem is "The Statue and the Bust." The story is so well known that it seems almost superfluous to recall

<sup>1</sup> "Mother Julian of Norwich," preface, page xii.

it. "The Riccardi," bringing home his bride, is aware, in an instant, that she and his Duke have fallen in love at first sight. Thereafter he immures her in his palace, her largest liberty henceforth being freedom to watch the street below. Restricted thus, she resolves, as the Duke rides by, to fly to him in the garb of a page; the Duke determining too that at all costs they will fly together.

But Browning, who knew so intimately the small windings and purposeless follies of the human heart, read their futility like an open book. Each, for an almost idle reason of apparent convenience, defers the wrongful act, once, twice, often. And so the moment for action never comes :

" But next day passed, and next day yet,  
With still fresh cause to wait one day more  
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

So weeks grew months, years—gleam by gleam  
The glory dropped from their youth and love,  
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream."

Finally he leaves us with the conviction that they did not refuse the conclusion because it was wrong, but from infirmity of purpose. "Well," some will urge, "but at any rate they did not *do* wrong." Quick as thought Browning bursts forth, "They *did* do wrong: they achieved the utter worthlessness of those who take no side; they sinned the deadly sin of Laodicea :

" So while these wait the trump of doom,  
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,  
Nights and days in the narrow room?

" Still I suppose they sit and ponder  
 What a gift life was, ages ago,  
 Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

" Only they see not God, I know,  
 Nor all that chivalry of His,  
 The soldier saints, who, row on row,

" Burn upward each to his point of bliss—

" I hear you reproach, ' But delay was best,  
 For their end was a crime.'—Oh, a crime will do  
 As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

" As a virtue golden through and through.

" The counter our lovers staked was lost  
 As surely as if it were lawful coin;  
 And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

" Is, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,  
 Though the end in sight was a vice, I say!  
 You of the virtue (we issue join)  
 How strive you? *De te fabula!*"

Browning is not saying, as some have seemed to suppose, that good is no better than evil. What he does declare is that lukewarmness, halting between two opinions, backbonelessness, looking so long before you leap that you never leap at all—all that is worse, if possible, than deliberate wrong-doing. Perhaps some have been shocked just because he does thus fling it out, far more as an intuitively known, than as a rationally argued proposition; though it is like some other mystically apprehended truths, capable of reasoned support. For example, it might be urged on empirical grounds that

invertebrateness is, from the standpoint of social ethics—that fashionable study nowadays—more objectionable even than deliberate wrong-doing on account of its ingrained futility and incorrigibility, and not least objectionable because it defies all possibility of calculation. Browning had weighty authority in support of his doctrine. “Woe,” said the son of Sirach more than two thousand years ago, “woe be to fearful hearts, and faint hands, and the sinner that goeth two ways.”

Dante came nearer to the exact piercing point when, with Virgil, he stood outside Hell’s Gate, on the dark, unlocated plain, and they perceived the faint, glimmering shades of the “Trimmers,” the ghostly forms of those who, in this world, chose neither good nor evil, but were “for themselves.” In a terrible sentence, which has rung down the ages, Dante described their sin, the sin of Laodicea :

“Che fece per viltate il gran rifiuto.”

Surely this scorn of “each frustrate ghost,” with “the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,” which rests on no carefully linked chain of reasoning, but burns up in the poetry of Dante and Browning like some withering, blasting flame, surely this scorn came to them from Primitive Christianity. In the “Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia,” in the Apocalypse of S. John the Divine, one, and one only, Laodicea, receives a warning and a rebuke unrelieved by any recognition of worth, any acknowledgment of redeeming virtue. And

why? Just on account of the "unlit lamp and the ungirt loin":

"I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold.  
I would thou wert cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold  
nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth."

Browning treats this instance of moral insight in a unique way. Generally, if he argues a point out, he leaves it to be taken or left: as, on quite another ground, he left the hammer-stroke of Ivàn's unanswerable question; as a rule he will not didactically force his moral home. But of such prime importance, apparently, does he consider this immediate conviction of the irremovable wretchedness of indecision that he will, if possible, stimulate the consciousness so that it may be ready to receive the truth's flashing light; for once he forces it on us, declines to let us wriggle out:

"You of the virtue (we issue join)  
How strive you? *De te fabula!*"

It would be a mistake, as I have said already, to assume that mysticism is a mode of religious thought only; any *immediate* intuition of truth is of the same kind. It is as a philosophic rather than as a religious Mystic that many might think of Browning. His tendency to this particular view of things appeared in that poem which, though it was welcomed and praised on its publication, and was transcribed whole by Dante Gabriel Rossetti from the British Museum copy, yet was forgotten soon by the public. Browning

himself shelved it rather in later years; yet those who have read these lines from "Pauline" can hardly have lost all recollection of them:

"Up for the glowing day, leave the old woods!  
See, they part like a ruined arch: the sky!  
Nothing but sky appears, so close the roots  
And grass of the hill-top level with the air—  
Blue sunny air, where a great cloud floats laden  
With light, like a dead whale that white birds pick,  
Floating away in the sun in some north sea.  
Air, air, fresh life-blood, thin and searching air,  
The clear dear breath of God that loveth us,  
Where small birds reel and winds take their delight!  
Water is beautiful, but not like air:  
See where the solid azure waters lie  
Made as of thickened air, and down below,  
The fern ranks, like a forest, spread themselves,  
As though each pore could feel the element  
Where the quick glancing serpent winds his way.  
Float with me there, Pauline!—but not like air.  
Down the hill! Stop—a clump of trees, see, set  
On a heap of rocks, which look o'er the far plains,  
And envious climbing shrubs would mount to rest  
And peer from their spread boughs: there they  
    wave, looking  
At the muleteers who whistle as they go  
To the merry chime of their morning bells, and all  
The little smoking cots and fields and banks  
And copses bright in the sun."

I quote this vividly descriptive passage first, though it occurs near the end, because it proves incontrovertibly the intense alertness of Browning's senses, the ordinary five senses, claimed by some psychologists as the *sole* avenues along which all knowledge must pass. Here, in these twenty-five lines, we get impres-

sions of sight, sound, touch, and smell, and even an ephemeral suggestion of taste; though it seems a crime to analyse in this almost chemical manner one of the most beautiful natural descriptions in the whole range of English verse. It is worth while to recall, just for an instant, two or three of the vividest pictures:

“ . . . where a great cloud floats laden  
With light, like a dead whale that white birds pick,  
Floating away in the sun in some north sea.”

Or:

“ . . . air,  
The clear dear breath of God that loveth us,  
When small birds reel and winds take their delight !”

And again, more mundane, but so replete with the indigenous English love of plain, homely, country life, even if it be not a typically English landscape:

“ . . . the muleteers, who whistle as they go  
To the merry chime of their morning bells, and all  
The little smoking cots and fields and banks  
And copses bright in the sun.”

The man who wrote those lines did not fall back ever on the apprehensions of the “inner sense,” because his physical five senses were deficient, because colour, and light, and swift movement, and the audible echoes of human life were just nothing at all to him. Rather because they meant so much, because they were all that to him, therefore his addiction to “the other way



of love" is additionally striking. It is interesting in considering the contrast between the vision of sense and that of the soul, to recall a striking mystical aphorism from what Dr R. A. Nicholson called the "new Súfism" of the ninth century A.D.: "When the gnostic's spiritual eye is opened, his bodily eye is shut: he sees nothing but God."<sup>1</sup> The point of interest is not that a man may possess both, but rather that they are not *simultaneously* operative.

But despite all his manifest interest in the phenomenal world, Browning, in this, his first poem, is to be found groping for what the philosopher calls the noumenal, for that which lies behind the manifold of sense:

"I cannot chain my soul, it will not rest  
In its clay prison, this most narrow sphere;  
It has strange powers and feelings and desires,  
Which I cannot account for nor explain,  
But which I stifle not, being bound to trust  
All feelings equally, to hear all sides;  
Yet I cannot indulge them, and they live  
Referring to some state or life unknown."<sup>2</sup>

In a similar verse he writes:

"... I know this earth is not my sphere  
For I cannot so narrow me, but that  
I still exceed it."<sup>3</sup>

Still more definitely he admits the disparity

<sup>1</sup> "The Mystics of Islam," page 7. By Reynold A. Nicholson, Litt.D.

<sup>2</sup> "The Works of Robert Browning" (edition of 1886), vol. i., page 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i., page 26.

between sensible and extra-sensible apprehensions:

"There's some vile juggle with my reason here;  
I feel I but explain to my own loss.  
These impulses; they live no less the same."<sup>1</sup>

The strife thickens; the puzzle grows:

"... I cannot be immortal, nor taste all.  
O God, where does this tend—these struggling aims?  
What would I have? What is this 'sleep' which  
seems

To bound all? Can there be a 'waking' point  
Of crowning life? The soul would never rule;  
It would be first in all things; it would have  
Its utmost pleasure filled, but, that complete  
Commanding, for commanding, sickens it."<sup>2</sup>

And then, at last, come the lines of climax:

"My God, my God, let me for once look on Thee,  
As though naught else existed, we alone!  
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark  
Expands till I can say, even from myself,  
I need Thee, and I feel Thee, and I love Thee."<sup>3</sup>

This last passage is interesting on account of Browning's obvious reference to that which Dr Inge has called "the curious doctrine which we find in the Mystics of the Middle Ages, that there is 'at the apex of the mind' a spark which is consubstantial with the uncreated ground of the Diety."<sup>4</sup> It is not the only time that Browning uses this word which we find in Ruysbroeck,

<sup>1</sup> "The Works of Robert Browning," vol. i., page 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i., page 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i., page 33.

<sup>4</sup> "Bampton Lectures," page 7. By W. R. Inge, D.D.

Eckhart, and other Mystics. As Dr Inge reminds us, the early poem "Any Wife to Any Husband" contains these lines:

"And 'twould not be because my eye grew dim,  
Thou couldst not find the love there, thanks to Him  
Who never is dishonoured in the spark  
He gave us from His fire of fires, and bade  
Remember whence it sprang, nor be afraid  
While that burns on, though all the rest grow dark."

One can hardly help saying that all that is "curious" in the matter is that Dr Inge should have interpreted the doctrine in so literal a sort of fashion as he apparently does. As Eckhart has been mentioned, it may not be without interest, while we are considering this question of vision, to recall his daring image in his sermon, "True Hearing," where he says, "*The eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me.* My eye and God's eye is one eye, and one sight, and one knowledge, and one love"; one may compare this with a saying of Dhu 'l Nun, of Egypt, where the latter, speaking of "gnostics," says: "They move as God causes them to move, and their words are the words of God which roll upon their tongues, and their sight is the sight of God which has entered their eyes."<sup>1</sup>

Eckhart would seem to have wandered beyond the limits of orthodoxy; while of the similar Oriental doctrine Dr Nicholson asks pertinently: "Surely a God Who is all in all can have no

<sup>1</sup> "The Mystics of Islam," page 79. By Dr R. A. Nicholson.

reason for thus revealing Himself: why should the One pass over into the many? ”<sup>1</sup> The snare of pantheism has ever been its tendency to forget the transcendence by over-emphasising the immanence. The balance is kept truly by Ruysbroeck in the following passage: “ Nous avons donc tous au-dessus de notre être créé une vie éternelle en Dieu, comme en notre cause vivante qui nous a fait et créés de rien ; mais nous ne sommes pas Dieu et nous ne sommes pas faits nous-mêmes. Nous ne sommes pas non plus émanés de Dieu, selon la nature ; mais parceque Dieu nous a connus et voulus éternellement en lui-même, il nous a fait, non par nature, ni par nécessité, mais dans la liberté de son vouloir. Il connaît d’ailleurs toute chose, et tout ce qu’il veut il peut l’accomplir au ciel et sur la terre. Il est en nous lumière et vérité ; il se montre au sommet de notre être créé, élevant notre pensée en pureté, notre esprit jusqu’à la liberté divine et notre entendement jusqu’à une nudité sans images. Il nous éclaire de la sagesse éternelle et il nous apprend à regarder et à contempler sa richesse insondable.”<sup>2</sup>

But, to return to “ Pauline,” we find the poem closing on the note of mystical satisfaction :

“ No less I make an end in perfect joy,

For this song shall remain to tell for ever  
That when I lost all hope of such a change  
Suddenly beauty rose on me again.”

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<sup>1</sup> “ The Mystics of Islam,” page 80. By Dr R. A. Nicholson.

<sup>2</sup> “ Le Miroir du Salut Éternel,” chapter xvii.

Possibly three lines from a later poem may elaborate and explain the meaning here which Browning, fumbling somewhat after a philosophy, already held and intended dimly—the well-known lines from the “Guardian Angel”:

“O world, as God has made it! all is beauty:  
And knowing this is love, and love is duty,  
What further may be sought for or declared?”

This is still but a halting exposition, far enough away from the fuller development in his later work; but the two passages together show the dawn of a thought, which grew mightily as the years passed on. No one pretends that “*Pauline*” contains Browning’s best work. It is sometimes dull; here and there the verse halts lamely. But although it has been overlooked and surprisingly neglected, it does hold the promise of the future. Possibly he, in his whimsical fashion, summed up its deserved criticism in that quaint French “note,” which he represents *Pauline* as adding to the work of her “*pauvre ami*,” and hazarding this judgment, “*Le mieux serait de brûler ceci, mais que faire?*” After all, there are things not perfect—full, if anyone will insist on it, of imperfections—which, for all that, we cannot find the heart or the way to burn.

There is a further point of interest in this early poem, viz. that the process of thought in it is identical with that which obtains all through his work. Surely that process is through the things of sense to the matters of direct philosophic

intuition, whence he attains at last to religious mysticism.

Naturally it is to Paracelsus that the student will turn next, to the Paracelsus whom Browning created out of the legends and traditions clinging round a man of the sixteenth century, a man who, according to those, was little better than a quack, though, under the poet's handling, he comes to be a creature of rare and winning appeal. It is interesting to find, close to the beginning of the poem, a speech of Paracelsus which recalls the passage which I quoted, in proof of the intense quickness of Browning's senses, from "Pauline":

". . . when Festus learns  
That every common pleasure of the world  
Affects me as himself: that I have just  
As varied appetite for joy, derived  
From common things, a stake in life, in short,  
Like his . . .  
He may convince himself that, this in view,  
I shall act well advised."

It is a mistake which often is, though it never should be, made, that the Mystic is either a mooning sentimentalist given over to the flimsiest feeling, or else a dullard, deaf, blind, and dense to the attractions of this palpable world, who therefore falls back upon a figment of his imagination, which he chooses to call direct knowledge of truth, immediate converse with God. In one of Meister Eckhart's "Sermons"<sup>1</sup> a passage occurs which contains his view of the nature of renunciation and its results: "If the

<sup>1</sup>"The Nearness of the Kingdom."

soul is to know God it must forget itself and lose itself. . . . When it has lost itself and everything in God, it finds itself again in God when it attains to the knowledge of Him, and it finds also everything which it had abandoned complete in God." Another aspect of this doctrine is conveyed in the same sermon in the terse phrase, "He knows God rightly who knows Him everywhere."

At the outset Paracelsus is far enough from Eckhart's conditions; yet to bring him to these he need forgo nothing which he already possesses; he need, for instance, not dull his acute sense of the outer world; only the operation of that sense need be changed: individuality is after all an element in unity as the one falls into his proper place among the many.

"The man who abides in God's love must be dead to himself and all created things, and regard himself as a mere unit among a thousand millions. Such a man must renounce himself and all the world. Supposing a man possessed all the world, and gave it back to God intact just as he received it, God would give him back all the world and everlasting life to boot"; so spoke Eckhart in his sermon on "True Hearing."<sup>1</sup> In a lower key certainly, but still quite evidently, Browning preaches the same truth when he speaks of

" . . . the race of Man  
That receives life in parts to live in a whole  
And grow here according to God's plan."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Old Pictures in Florence."

It is somewhat anticipating the work of tracing Browning's unfolding mysticism, yet this seems the best place to point out that in the poem called "Reverie," a poem which rendered "Asolando," the last volume he ever wrote, remarkable, he develops much more fully this doctrine of the one and the many:

" Somewhere, below, above,  
 Shall a day dawn—this I know—  
 When Power, which vainly strove  
 My weakness to overthrow,  
 Shall triumph. I breathe, I move,

" I truly am, at last !  
 For a veil is real between  
 Me and the truth which passed  
 Fitful, half-guessed, half-seen,  
 Grasped at—not gained, held fast.

" I for my race and me  
 Shall apprehend life's law :  
 In the legend of man shall see  
 Writ large what small I saw  
 In my life's tale : both agree."

In the midst of the first act of " Paracelsus " we only catch a glimpse of his aim :

" And I smiled as one never smiles but once,  
 Then first discovering my own aim's extent,  
 Which sought to comprehend the works of God,  
 And God Himself and all God's intercourse  
 With the human mind ; I understood, no less,  
 My fellows' studies, whose true worth I saw,  
 But smiled not, well aware Who stood by me.  
 And softer came the voice—' There is a way :  
 'Tis hard for flesh to tread therein, imbued  
 With frailty—hopeless, if indulgence first



Have ripened inborn germs of sin to strength :  
Wilt thou adventure for My sake and man's,  
Apart from all reward? ' And last it breathed,  
' Be happy, My good soldier : I am by thee,  
Be sure, even to the end ! '—I answered not  
Knowing Him. As He spoke, I was endued  
With comprehension, and a steadfast will,  
And when He ceased, my brow was sealed His own."

Then in response to this most searching appeal  
comes Paracelsus's resolve :

" . . . I go to prove my soul !  
I see my way as birds their trackless way.  
I shall arrive ! What time, what circuit first,  
I ask not : but unless God send His hail  
Or blinding fire-balls, sleet or stifling snow,  
In some time, His good time, I shall arrive ;  
He guides me and the bird. In His good time ! "

Here, surely, is the Mystic's immediate vision :

" I see my way as birds their trackless way."

How better could human words express the  
pursuit of attainment by non-sensible means?  
Then follows the speech which shows clearly that  
Paracelsus, at any rate in some moods, must be  
reckoned among the Mystics, though here it is a  
matter of method rather than of aim. Speaking  
of the sages, of the seekers after truth who have  
preceded him, he cries :

" No ! I reject and spurn them utterly  
And all they teach. Shall I sit beside  
Their dry wells, with a white lip and filmed eye,  
While in the distance, heaven is blue above  
Mountains where sleep the unsunned tarns."

The gap between true and false mysticism



There is an inmost centre in us all,  
Where truth abides in fulness; and around,  
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,  
This perfect clear perception—which is truth,  
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh,  
Blinds it, and makes all error : and to KNOW  
Rather consists in opening out a way  
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,  
Than in effecting entry for a light  
Supposed to be without."

This inmost centre is surely of the same nature as Eckhart's spark and Ruysbroeck's flame, at the apex of the soul, both of which are consubstantial with the Deity. The meeting-place of Divine and human has had many names in the mouths of the Mystics, but it can have only one nature. In Book II there are lines suggesting that in special hours of illumination Paracelsus really did attain, even though he fell back again and again :

"Some one truth would dimly beacon me  
From mountains rough with pines, and flit and wink  
O'er dazzling wastes of frozen snow, and tremble  
Into assured light in some branching mine  
Where ripens, swathed in fire, the liquid gold—  
And all the beauty, all the wonder fell  
On either side the truth, as its mere robe;  
I see the robe now—then I saw the form."

Further, like other Mystics, Paracelsus insists that the method of acquisition is direct, intuitive; there must be no bar, no intermediary between him who apprehends and that which is apprehended :

"I can abjure so well the idle arts  
These pedants strive to learn and teach; Black Arts,

Great Works, the Secret and Sublime, forsooth—  
 Let others prize; too intimate a tie  
 Connects me with our God! ”

His aim transcends, we here perceive, the acquisition of mere philosophic, of mere natural, truth; it is these, but surrounded, completed, by divine things, which he covets; he is seeking the whole globe of truth:

“ God helping, God directing everywhere,  
 So that the earth shall yield her secrets up.”

Indeed, only one thing is lacking, but it happens to be the most important of all: that which Dr Inge called “ the Mystic’s minor premise,” viz. the conviction that love is the atmosphere wherein alone direct, mystical knowledge can develop. This doctrine of the necessity, the all-essentialness, of love, Browning puts forcibly into the mouth of Festus. But it fails to convince Paracelsus, who has far to go, and failure, sore and recurring, to encounter—for, as Eckhart says, “ Sorrow is the root of all virtue ”<sup>1</sup>—or ever he perceives how far he is surpassed by the lover-poet, Aprile. A portion of the very long passage in the second book, wherein the slow breaking-in of light on Paracelsus is portrayed, will recall the situation to all who know the poem. Aprile is speaking:

“ I would love infinitely, and be loved.

. . . . .  
 . . . nay, listen!

Knowing ourselves, our world, our task so great,  
 Our time so brief, ’tis clear if we refuse

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<sup>1</sup> “ Sermons ”—Morality.

The means so limited, the tools so rude  
To execute our purpose, life will fleet,  
And we shall fade and leave our task undone.  
We will be wise in time.

Could I retain one strain of all the psalm  
Of the angels, one word of the fiat of God,  
To let my followers know what such things are!  
I would adventure nobly for their sakes:  
When nights were still, and still the moaning sea,  
And far away I could descry the land  
Whence I departed, whither I return,  
I would dispart the waves, and stand once more  
At home, and load my bark, and hasten back,  
And fling my gains to them, worthless or true.  
'Friends,' I would say, 'I went far, far for them.'

Thus for my higher loves, and thus even weakness  
Would win me honour. But not these alone  
Should claim my care; for common life, its wants  
And ways, would I set forth in beauteous hues;  
The lowest hind should not possess a hope,  
A fear, but I'd be by him, saying better  
Than he his own heart's language. I would live  
For ever in the thoughts I thus explored,  
As a discoverer's memory is attached  
To all he finds."

This excerpt from a long passage may serve to convey the poet's pleading; and at last, as he pleads, the truth of his own failure, and the disastrous depth and extent of the tragedy of that failure, burst on Paracelsus, and he cries:

"Love me, henceforth, Aprile, while I learn  
To love; and merciful God, forgive us both!  
We wake at length from weary dreams; but both  
Have slept in fairyland: though dark and drear  
Appears the world before us, we no less

Wake with our wrists and ankles jewelled still.  
 I too have sought to KNOW as thou to LOVE—  
 Excluding love as thou refusedst knowledge.  
 Still, thou hast beauty, and I, power. We wake.

Die not, Aprile! we must never part.  
 Are we not halves of one dissevered world,  
 Whom this strange chance unites once more? Part?  
 Never!  
 Till thou the lover, know; and I, the knower,  
 Love—until both are saved."

The true mystical doctrine in its full development is not here; but Paracelsus is groping after it as he stumbles up the steep ascent of attainment. More clearly in "Easter Day," written fifteen years later than "Paracelsus," Browning supplies "the Mystic's minor premise," when he reminds us of the scheme according to which God planned man's world:

"He Who in all His work below  
 Adapted to the needs of man,  
 Made love the basis of the plan,"

and finally, when after the vision—

"I knew Him through that dread disguise  
 As the whole God within His eyes  
 Embraced me,"—

the humbled learner of the meaning of "Easter Day" confesses at last:

"And so I live, you see,  
 Go through the world, try, prove, reject,  
 Prefer, still struggling to effect  
 My warfare, happy that I can  
 Be crowned and thwarted like a man,

Not left, in God's contempt, apart,  
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,  
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize."

The wistful lines in "Ferishtah's Fancies," written thirty-four years after "Easter Day," shed light on the uphill path which lies before humanity:

" . . . Man's part  
Is plain—to send love forth—astray, perhaps;  
No matter, he has done his part."

Even if we think Browning's content with the faulty "doing" a little over-marked, we cannot cavil at his view of the nature of the task. No other English poet has surpassed, perhaps no other has equalled, his conviction of the all-essentialness of love.

The student of English mysticism will remember, again, that Richard Rolle, in "The Form of Perfect Living," wrote "Truth may be without love, but it cannot help without it."

In a dreamy age, over-given to posing, we shall do well to recollect that Browning's idea of love is not of any dream of ease:

"There is a way, 'tis hard for flesh to tread therein," said the minatory voice to Paracelsus long before he came, with Aprile's help, to understand the inner significance of the warning. And elsewhere, Browning tells us that

"When pain ends, gain ends too,"<sup>1</sup>

a ringing echo of Blaise Pascal's sad phrase:

<sup>1</sup> "A Death in the Desert."

“Pour marquer toujours qu'on ne pouvait trouver la joie que par l'amertume”—that doctrine so unpalatable, so irrevocably true.

The love of our fellows, of those whom Richard Rolle called “our even-Christians,” which Festus pressed on Paracelsus as the necessary prelude to that love, which in the mystical view is the avenue to knowledge of the truth, of God: “If any man wills to do His Will, he shall know of the doctrine”—this way of love is never described as a path of ease—

“Primrosed and hung with shade.”

S. John's words, so strangely neglected by so many, plainly set forth the fact that the plunge must be made headlong, at all costs. We shall not know *first*; it is no bargain of which we know the other side. We must surrender to know. To most men, full—whether their natural abilities be great or small—of intellectual self-sufficiency; possessed, obsessed by the “rights of reason,” it is just that child-like yielding which seems so intolerable.

“The soul went forth,” says S. John of the Cross, “led of God, through love of Him only, and with that love inflamed, in the dark night, which is the privation of, and purgation from, all sensual desires in all outward things of this world, all the pleasures of the flesh, and all the satisfactions of the will.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Ascent of Mount Carmel,” Book I., chapter i., section 3.



As we hear of discourses, or read books and articles assuring us that the Catholic Faith must be restated "in terms of modern thought," that the "modern man must have his reason satisfied," one wonders if that pregnant sentence of the Apostle of Love has really no meaning for these learned divines: "If any man wills to do His Will, he shall know of the doctrine." For surely there is no half-way house? It is either supreme Wisdom or nonsense. We know, or if we choose to take the trouble we can know, which the Saints found. If sinners make the great venture they do not find it otherwise, unless they expect an immediate discovery, and growing impatient, give up. So once more we learn that the Mystic's path is not one of easy wool-gathering, but is that hardest of all emprises, the total surrender of self, of self's will for Love's high sake. Possibly those who object most to the stern warnings of the symbol of St Athanasius might ponder on the fact that salvation is there connected not with the province of intellect first and foremost, but with that of will.

Quicunque *vult*—how well we know those words. The same lesson lurks in the closing warning: "Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam æternum: qui vero mala in ignem æternum." Perhaps a remark of George Tyrrell may throw light on this particular function of love. First, he reminds us that "love itself is a contemplative act, *complacentia boni*—a gazing with delight upon the fair and the true; the mind's embrace

of that which is its food and eternal life";<sup>1</sup> and secondly, that "all love is mystical in that it refuses the exact analysis of reason, which, without contradicting, it ineffably transcends."<sup>2</sup>

Surely every human being who has ever really loved anybody or anything (omitting, of course, self-love), in which category probably we are all included, will admit, if he think seriously about the question, that this last proposition is most certainly true: that love does, as a matter of simple, everyday fact, as well as a matter of heavenly feeling, "refuse the exact analysis of reason which, without contradicting, it ineffably transcends." If a person can be brought thus far, and can then proceed to grasp the "Mystic's minor premise," that love is the atmosphere wherein real knowledge develops, then he will see that he need not join the "many" to whom, as Father Tyrrell remarked, "mysticism means simply an abandonment of all attempt to reconcile the 'religious sentiment' with intelligent thought; a deliberate yielding of oneself a prey to any unchecked, unverifiable fancy or speculation which seems to interpret the vague yearning of the soul after God."<sup>3</sup> Were the "many" justified in that so unflattering opinion, it is quite evident that the long list of men claimed by Baron von Hügel as being of mystical tendency, could never have been drawn up. Some time had to elapse still before Browning would put forth the full strength of his mysti-

<sup>1</sup> "Faith of the Millions," page 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 283.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 279.

cism, for though the sweep of thought in "Paracelsus" (which appeared in 1835) is wider and deeper, yet it, too, shows that preponderance of philosophic insight, tinged with religious, which was conspicuous in "Pauline" two years before. As we have seen, "Easter Day" (whose date is 1850) showed the tide to be running fuller; and then his more developed view appears fourteen years later still in that most characteristic and profound poem "A Death in the Desert." There at last we find such passages as:

"These—(i.e. the 'ashes' of S. John's brains)—  
these make effort on the last o' the flesh,  
Trying to taste again the truth of things,—  
(He smiled)—their very superficial truth;  
As that ye are my sons, that it is long  
Since James and Peter had release by death.

What if the truth broke on me from above  
As once and oft-times? Such might hap again:  
Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,  
With head wool-white, eyes, flame, and feet like  
brass,

The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen"—

or again, and far more "intuitive" than anything which has been, so far, quoted:

"... how shall I assure them? Can they share  
—They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength  
About each spirit, that needs must bide its time,  
Living and learning still as years assist  
Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see—  
With me, who hardly am withheld at all,  
But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,

Lie bare to the universal prick of light?  
 Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,  
 We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain ends  
 too."

It is perhaps interesting to remember that S. Augustine in his *Homilies on the Gospel of S. John*, speaks of him as the apostle who "symbolises the life of sight in Heaven." Dr Gore quotes the whole passage, which contains an interesting comparison of the special functions of S. Peter and S. John. The opening sentence, which is as follows, is sufficient to suggest S. Augustine's line of thought: "Two states of life, the life of faith on earth, and the life of sight in Heaven, were symbolised by Peter and John, the one by the one, the other by the other; but in this life they both of them walked for a time by faith (which Peter represents), and the other—sight (which John represents) they shall both of them enjoy eternally."<sup>1</sup>

To much this same period of the poet's thought belong those lines which in "The Ring and the Book" he puts into the mouth of Pope Innocent XII.:

"Yet my poor spark had for its source the sun;  
 Thither I sent the great looks which compel  
 Light from its fount, or seen or else surmised,  
 Remembered or divined, as mere man may:  
 I know just so, not otherwise."

Surely here at last Browning definitely names

<sup>1</sup> "Roman Catholic Claims," quoted pages 81, 82.  
 By the Rt. Rev. C. Gore, D.D.

the two methods of knowing: the discursive, the intuitive; the rational, the mystical:

“ Seen or else surmised,  
Remembered or divined.”

Yet once again he insists on the same distinction in the way of knowledge when the Pope asks:

“ . . . so my heart be struck  
What care I—by God’s gloved hand or the bare? ”—

which is an expression of the antithesis conveyed by the words *seen*, *divined*, and *surmised*, *remembered*.

It will be remembered that the claim which Baron von Hügel made for Browning was the possession of a “ mystical element.” In fact, he was a Mystic only in some moods. When he sets to work to consider definitely and analyse man’s method of acquiring knowledge, he is, at times, capable of avoiding, perhaps of deliberately setting aside, every trace of mysticism. There is a passage in “ The Ring and the Book ” which is a very clear example:—

“ Man’s mind, what is it but a convex glass  
Wherein are gathered all the scattered points  
Picked out of the immensity of sky  
To reunite there, be our heaven for earth,  
Our known unknown, our God revealed to man.”

Some lines from “ A Death in the Desert ” may well be compared with the above passages, lines which, besides being remarkable in themselves, are certainly not less so in this poem

where mysticism is bound up, one might have thought inseparably, in the very heart of its thought. Yet here Browning can describe the growth of human knowledge without so much as a hint of its possible mystical, intuitive method:

" First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,  
Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,  
Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law,  
God's gift was that man should conceive of truth,  
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake  
As midway help till he reach fact indeed."

Here, quite plainly, are two of those religious "stages" described by Baron von Hügel: the "child's" way by sense; the "youth's" way by argument;<sup>1</sup> but the third, the mystical, the intuitionist, is omitted, unless anyone could ingeniously twist it into the closing lines' vague suggestion.

But while we realise these limitations, we must remember that no student of Browning who would understand his mysticism, partial though it be, can afford to neglect altogether that jewel of his later years, so far not considered here, "Ferishtah's Fancies." At first sight "A Bean-Stripe" may seem to be the completest possible tribute to the material limits set to man's knowledge; the surest proof that he judges, and must judge, by the illusions of sense, and that "reality" ever escapes him. But its undercurrent is the very opposite to all that. Rather,

<sup>1</sup>"The Mystical Element of Religion," Vol. I., chapter ii., pages 50-53.

its burden is that man is misled by sense, still more by reason, and only catches the glimmer of truth by intuition. What but that can the rare irony mean of?—

“Palms furnish dates to eat, and leaves to shade  
—Maybe thatch huts with—have another use  
Than strikes the aphis,”

that is, of course, in those moments when the aphis trusts to his senses, and works up the manifold of sense by reflection. In the “Pillar at Sebsevar” Browning enunciates his mystical view less equivocally. The opening lines furnish its keynote:

“‘Knowledge deposed, then!’—groaned whom that  
most grieved  
As foolishhest of all the company.”

Then Ferishtah points to all-conquering power behind “knowledge,” to the Mystic’s medium:

“ . . . all I seem to know  
Is—I know nothing save that love I can  
Boundlessly, endlessly.”

And again, looking at it this time from another angle, he cries:

“ . . . knowledge means  
Ever renewed assurance by defeat  
That victory is somehow still to reach,  
But love is victory, the prize itself:  
Love—trust to!”

Once more:

“Wholly distrust thy knowledge, then; and trust  
As wholly love allied to ignorance!  
There lies thy truth and safety. . . .

So let us say—not ' Since we know, we love,'  
But rather, ' Since we love, we know enough.'

. . . . .  
Once more then, Friend—  
(Whatever in those careless ears of thine  
Withal I needs must round thee)—knowledge doubt  
Even wherein it seems demonstrable!  
Love—in the claim for love, that's gratitude  
For apprehended pleasure, nowise doubt!

Finally comes the climax, convincing hammer-stroke:

" . . . Consider well!  
Were knowledge all thy faculty, then God  
Must be ignored: love gains him by first leap."

Far removed as this high doctrine is from the tentative gropings of the earlier poems, yet the very fact of the gradual and traceable growth of Browning's mystical apprehension avails to prove Baron von Hügel's claim. Had he been "a born Mystic," this development could not have been so obvious. Browning is not one of those great Mystics who "saw" from the first, always, inerrantly. With all his marvellous power of grasping points of view entirely alien to his own—a capacity for which, perhaps, he has received too little credit—he was fundamentally of that rationalising, analysing spirit which in itself is opposed to mysticism. He is a blend of opposites; so it is quite true that he had a mystical *element*—that is all that need be claimed here.

If Browning's mysticism were less ineradicably ingrained than Wordsworth's, it was not so



entirely a power of *seeing through* external phenomena to that which lies behind, and therefore possibly it was more really spiritual, mystical. When he came to see, Browning seemed to see "farther," if one might say so, than even Wordsworth himself.

Possibly this obscure point may be cleared by the suggestion that there is a difference, very hard to render in words, and equally hard to miss in feeling, between Wordsworth's apostrophe, not far removed, in spite of its beauty, from pantheism:

"Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe!  
Thou soul that art the eternity of thought,  
That givest to forms and images a breath  
And everlasting motion";

and that flame-lit, apocalyptic description of S. John:

". . . me, who hardly am withheld at all,  
But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,  
Lie bare to the universal prick of light."

## FRANCIS THOMPSON

WHEN we come to treat of Francis Thompson we are in a region of greater certainty, of more precise accuracy, and of more defined limitations.

His poetry, on non-secular matters, falls more or less exactly into three divisions—divisions which, while they are not in themselves absolutely mutually exclusive, rather become so in his hands: poems religious, liturgical, and mystical. The first two tend naturally to overlap; but while a mystical poem must necessarily contain a religious element, one which is religious or liturgical needs by no means be mystical. This point is surely worth making, for there is a tendency nowadays to say every saint, or holy person, is and must be a Mystic; nay, more, we are dropping into the catch-phrase attitude: "After all, we are all Mystics," whereas the truth is that, after all we are not all of us any one thing; and we ought never to forget that mysticism, properly, denotes a *direct knowledge* of spiritual matters. Now it is possible—it would be a miserable prospect for some of us if it were not so—for many of us to attain holiness through following out the precepts

of God, given us through our Holy Church, conforming our lives, slowly, painfully, toilsomely to His Will, which Will is taught to us preceptually, not by revelation directly to our individual self. It is, in short, quite possible to grow to be "good" without sharing in the "visions" of mysticism proper.

Thompson, with true Catholic penetration, perceived at once the vital importance and the possible dangers of mysticism; therefore, though his first intention was to call one section of his work "Mystical Poems," he deliberately changed the title to "Poems of Sight and Insight." So they were entitled in "New Poems," which appeared during his life-time; and so they remain in the definitive edition of his works, issued by Mr Meynell in 1913.

Mysticism, the word if not the thing, has become fashionable. The spread of a shallow form of education, diffuse if neither deep nor solidly based, has fostered this fashion. It is idle to deplore the fact; the more practical course would be to make an attempt to persuade those who trifle with it what it is they are really doing. This Thompson clearly saw. Mr Everard Meynell, in his "Life" of the poet, devotes the opening pages of the tenth chapter to elucidating Thompson's reasons for "wariness about the word." There are indeed few pages in Mr Meynell's book more suggestive and, if one may say so, more convincing than those numbered 223 and 224, the pages which deal with the delicate treading in holy places, characteristic of

Thompson, as of all true Mystics—a manner of going so different from much that passes as spiritual to-day.

It is not likely that the poet was acquainted, nor perhaps his biographer, with an exposition of the underlying principles of this matter, which had been in the world some seventeen years when he was born, which aroused a storm of indignation and misunderstanding on its publication,<sup>1</sup> and which, when and after that had subsided, has fallen into an oblivion to be regretted; an exposition which, had he known it, he surely would have appreciated. I refer, of course, to Isaac Williams' Tract, "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge."

If that pamphlet could be recovered and disseminated among those who hold hazy and facile views of Mysticism, it might do not a little good.

There is, for instance, in the first paragraph of Part II, the interesting statement, elaborated with details concerning Aristotle, that "all moralists" (both pagan and Christian) "consider vice and virtue as states of darkness and light."<sup>2</sup>

The opening words of the Tract put the circumstances of illumination so clearly that modern minds inclined to meander emotionally might do worse than ponder them: "The object of the present inquiry is to ascertain whether

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* "The Oxford Movement," pages 67, 229. By R. W. Church.

<sup>2</sup> Tract, lxxx. 34.

there is not in GOD's dealings with mankind a very remarkable holding back of sacred and important truths, as if the knowledge of them were injurious to persons unworthy of them."

The plain inference is that fitness, which surely must include purity and love, must precede illumination; that it is no reward of all and sundry who think to obtain it by mere pleasant "feeling"; but that:

"A battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all."

This elementary fact is, in these days of increasing ease, too often forgotten. That to attain the state in which illumination can become possible is not a business of sentimentalising sloppily, Mr Williams urged by quotations from writers as dissimilar as Bishop Butler and Aristotle. He observes that the former taught "that going over the theories of religion has the effect of hardening the heart": of the latter he writes "And Aristotle had long before observed that the reason why persons did not improve in virtue was that they have recourse to theory and words to persuade themselves that they are good, and so do not labour after internal habits."<sup>1</sup>

More acutely penetrating still is the paragraph<sup>2</sup> headed: "That God punishes with blindness those who approach sacred truths with a speculative mind," which recalls the phrase of Thomas

<sup>1</sup> Tract, lxxx. 80.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxx. 45-50.

à Kempis in the last chapter of the "Imitation," a chapter which opens with the tremendous words: "*Cavendum est tibi a curiosa et inutili perscrutatione huius profundissime sacramenti, si non vis in dubitationis profundum submergi. . . . Plus valet Deus operari quam homo intellegere potest.*"

A view superficially somewhat unlike, but fundamentally the same, is to be found in Coventry Patmore's stanzas:

"Love blabb'd of is a great decline;  
A careless word unsanctions sense;  
But he who casts Heaven's truth to swine  
Consummates all incontinence.

"Not to unveil before the gaze  
Of an imperfect sympathy  
In aught we are, is the sweet praise  
And main sum of modesty."

In "Religio Poetæ," a book prized by Thompson, Mr Patmore wrote of reserve from yet another angle of vision: "It is the nature of man to believe the more because another believes, and to derive additional knowledge from another's mode of knowing. But how shall such testimony be conveyed without betraying knowledge which often cannot be attempted to be spoken without profanation by and peril to the ignorant, except in enigmas which are clear to those who know, but hopelessly dark to those

<sup>1</sup> "Collected Poems of Coventry Patmore," page 66.

who do not.”<sup>1</sup> It is wise to recollect further that Patmore insisted on a quite different point, one which must have appealed to Thompson, when he spoke of “a sort of interior sanctity which dares to see and confess to itself that it sees, though its vision should place it in a minority of one.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it will always puzzle the upholders of thorough-going private judgment that those who bow willingly to lawful authority can yet be so positive as to visions. But surely that is because they confuse the root difference between discursive reasoning and intuitive knowledge.

Finally, when we have realised the necessity for reserve, the wicked folly of casting pearls before swine, we must recollect that all these matters are comparative: that they are changed by era, place, circumstances, and perhaps most of all by race. What seems reticence to one is agonising exposure of inner mysteries to another; what appears flamboyant exaggeration to this man looks pale and thin to that.

Speaking of the fundamentals of the faith, Isaac Williams wrote: “If we attempt to arrive at any knowledge of them by speculation, or by any other mode but that of practical obedience, that knowledge is withheld, and we are punished for the attempt.”<sup>3</sup> Grave and solemn words indeed; yet they are but an elaboration of Our Lord’s own promise which must ever

<sup>1</sup> “*Religio Poetæ*,” essay iii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Essay xiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Tract*, lxxx. 45.

be the Mystic's Magna Carta: "If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine."<sup>1</sup>

Would that all those who take so lightly on their lips the words mysticism and mystical could bring themselves to ponder on this, the price of knowledge, which is obedience. We should hear no more of the shallow blasphemy of being "above all churches and sacraments"—a mood which perhaps fancies it is using a phrase of S. Augustine, for he once spoke<sup>2</sup> of a love which "supersedes all the sacraments—nor of similar slightings of the authority of the Mystical Body of Christ, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

It is perhaps justifiable to quote one passage from Mr Meynell's exposition of Thompson's standpoint with regard to mysticism: "That 'to the poet life is full of visions, to the Mystic it is one vision'<sup>3</sup> was the double rule of Francis Thompson's practice. Having regarded the visions and set them down, he would, in another capacity, call them in." (Surely this last sentence contains a metaphor precisely showing the nature of Thompson's mysticism as related to his purely poetic view of things?) "The vision enfolded them all. Thus, not long after it was written, he cancels even the 'Orient Ode,' and recants 'his bright sciential idolatry,' even though he had religiously adapted it to the

<sup>1</sup> S. John, vii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Mr Patmore—"Religio Poetæ," essay vii.

<sup>3</sup> Mr Albert Cock in the "Dublin Review."



greater glory of God before it was half confessed. The 'Anthem of Earth' and the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' would also come under the censorship of his anxious orthodoxy, to be in part condemned. What profiteth it a man, he asks in effect, if he gain the whole sun but lose the true Orient—Christ? <sup>1</sup>

This is not the place to discuss the relations which obtained between Patmore's poetry and Thompson's, or, more properly speaking, between their two modes of thought. But perhaps one or two points may be noted. The most casual reader will notice their common use of Latinisms; e.g. if anyone acquainted with both poets chanced in an anthology upon the following lines:

"Intend thine eye  
Into the dim and undiscover'd sky,"

and had not met them before, or had forgotten them, he might be puzzled to which of the two to assign them. Even here there is a difference: for in Patmore's verse we seem to see a predominance of the scholar's taste and percipience, while in Thompson's Latinised diction we meet rather the artist's love of colour, the musician's craving for sound.

Far more important than this, from the mere point of view of words, the medium in which they worked, is the fact that Patmore led the way, and Thompson followed in it, for bringing

<sup>1</sup>"Life of Francis Thompson," page 201. By Everard Meynell.

new sound values into English verse. Surely no other poet has surpassed either of them in their delicate use of what one may call the vowel-power of English. But not only that; they had, both of them, a most unusual aptitude for making the utmost of consonantal sounds. In Thompson's characteristic lines:

" The rains thereon that drip  
     Perturb  
     With drip acerb

" My subtly answering soul,"<sup>1</sup>

there is an echo of the tense, bitter-sweet acuity of Gregorio Allegri's " Miserere " music. Much of Thompson's verse has the same relation to what we may call ordinary poetic language as the smell of chrysanthemums bears to the fragrance of summer flowers. But to turn from form to matter, and particularly to the matter of the " Poems of Sight and Insight." Mr Meynell claims a close kinship between the two poets; he goes so far as to write: " Their thoughts chimed to the same stroke of metre and rhyme; for each of the mystical poems may be found suggestions in Patmore."<sup>2</sup> Yet one reader of both has wondered whether this last sentence be really true, and that notwithstanding the fact that Mr Meynell's comparison of the " Dread of Height " to two passages in Patmore's " Aurea Dicta " is not the closest he

<sup>1</sup> " Poems of Francis Thompson," vol. i., page 134.

<sup>2</sup> " Life," page 220.

could have found.<sup>1</sup> Surely the parallelism between Patmore's

"For dreadful truth it is that men  
Forget the heavens from whence they fall,"<sup>2</sup>

and Thompson's

"For low they fall whose fall is from the sky,"<sup>3</sup>

is most remarkable.

Perhaps the line which Patmore wrote to Thompson in August, 1895, had slipped from Mr Meynell's mind: "No one can really see anything but his own vision." There was close kinship between them, yet we know that "*Religio Poetæ*," for example, made Thompson hesitate until Father Anselm assured him of Patmore's orthodoxy. Everyone who is acquainted with the latter's poetry and prose knows how all through both he insisted again and again on his theory that human love is a type of, and an actual way to, the love of the creature for the Creator, thus perhaps, as some may think, turning round the teaching of S. John the Divine.<sup>4</sup>

Now of Thompson Mr Meynell writes the striking and surely accurate sentence: "It is within forbidden degrees if it cannot be referred back to Divine Love."<sup>5</sup> Thompson himself wrote

<sup>1</sup> "Life," page 220.

<sup>2</sup> "Collected Poems" of Coventry Patmore, page 66.

<sup>3</sup> "Collected Poems" of Francis Thompson, vol. ii., page 19.

<sup>4</sup> I S. John iv. 19.

<sup>5</sup> "Life," page 229.

of a critic of his own sequence, "A Narrow Vessel": "He could not understand that all human love was to me a symbol of divine love; nay, that human love was in my eyes a piteous failure unless as an image of the supreme Love which gave meaning and reality to its seeming insanity."<sup>1</sup> There is to both poets a close relation between human and Divine Love. With Patmore human love leads upwards. With Thompson Divine Love is the standard to which human must conform. While there is this relation there is still a subtle difference between the two men's outlook. Thompson, who wrote "A Narrow Vessel," surely never would have uttered Patmore's "Tristitia"; while from neither of them could have come Dowson's "Impenitentia Ultima." Of Patmore it is perhaps difficult to say whether he exalted the ideal of human passion or lowered the conception of Heavenly Love, though the present writer would choose the first horn of the dilemma. That one would never ask such a question in Thompson's case indicates the delicate yet real distinction between them. I suppose of that section of Thompson's "Poems" which I have called religious, "The Hound of Heaven" will stand, while time endures, as his most wonderful, most appealing work. It is not mystical, I think.

On the other hand the most liturgical of all his compositions, the "Orient Ode," not really

<sup>1</sup>"Life," page 230.

"recalled," as Mr Meynell suggests, is placed among the "Poems of Sight and Insight," i.e. among those which he would have called mystical had he been able to bring himself to adventure that word. We may find the same kind of setting—though with only one word of really ecclesiastical import—in those processional lines in the "Ode to the Setting Sun"; when speaking of death and birth he writes:

"And of these two the fairer thing is Death,  
Mystical twins of Time inseparable,  
The younger hath the holier array,  
And hath the awfuller sway :  
It is the falling star that trails the light,  
It is the breaking wave that hath the might,  
The passing shower that rainbows maniple.  
Is it not so, O thou down-stricken Day,  
That draw'st thy splendours round thee in thy fall?  
High was thine Eastern pomp inaugural;  
But thou dost set in statelier pageantry,  
Lauded with tumults of a firmament :  
Thy visible music-blasts make deaf the sky,  
Thy cymbals clang to fire the occident,  
Thou dost thy dying so triumphantly,  
I see the crimson blaring of thy shawms."

In the final edition of Thompson's "Poems" this Ode has a place to itself among the earlier poems; while in the previous volume, "New Poems," it was printed among the "Miscellaneous Odes."

Is it merely fanciful to suggest a likeness between these lines which I have quoted and those which close Patmore's "Victory in Defeat,"

words which that daring writer puts into the mouth of very GOD:

“The man who though his fights be all defeats,  
     Still fights,  
     Enters at last  
 The heavenly Jerusalem’s rejoicing streets  
 With glory more, and more triumphant rites  
 Than always-conquering Joshua’s, when his blast  
 The frightened walls of Jericho down cast;  
     And lo, the glad surprise  
     Of peace beyond surmise,  
 More than in common saints, for ever in his eyes.”

It seems a pity that a comfort-loving, faint-hearted generation cannot take some heart of hope and set forth to do a little fighting, a little struggling, even if instant victory be not always the forgone conclusion.<sup>1</sup>

From these liturgical poems we may turn to the last section, the mystical. Those who will read the fragment of a preface (designed for but not prefixed to “New Poems”) which is printed in Mr Meynell’s “Life”<sup>2</sup> of the poet, may be surprised to find that Thompson said of “The Mistress of Vision” that it was “a fantasy with no more than an illusive tinge of psychic significance.” And yet, besides the essentially mystical perception in

“When earth and Heaven lay down the veil,  
 And that apocalypse turns thee pale;

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<sup>1</sup> This passage was written many months before the outbreak of European War; and refers to none of those who have borne a gallant part in it. It applies more forcibly than ever to any who may have shirked whatever share fell to them.

<sup>2</sup> Page 237.

When thy seeing blindeth thee  
 To what thy fellow-mortals see;  
 When their sight to thee is sightless,  
 Their living, death; their light, most lightless;”—

it contains two lines which are the expression of the very fundamental A B C of mystical method:

“ Mine eyes saw not, and I saw,”  
 and:

“ The ravished soul her meanings knew. Mine ears  
 heard not, and I heard.”

Possibly Thompson did not mean quite the same thing when in “ The Hollow Wood ” he wrote:

“ . . . have but the ear the ear within,  
 And you may hear, if you hold you mute,”

but anyone who is aware of the Presence behind external nature would find it difficult not to take these lines in a mystical sense.

It is almost profanity to attempt to estimate the super-sensual apprehension, whether—to use the terms which belong to the five senses—of sight or sound, in that poem which is unique in the great volume of English poetry, the “ Dread of Height.” But perhaps those who have allowed themselves to identify mysticism with some comfortable doctrine of easy feeling, if they can grasp the pain of strife in those tenuous, elusive

“ Tidings from the vast,”  
 may pause in affright as Thompson cries:

“ Ah, for a heart less native to high Heaven,  
 A hooded eye, for jesses and restraint.”

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<sup>1</sup> “ Collected Poems,” vol. ii., page 190.

We are brought back, not to any way of ease, but to the drear, stripped condition of S. John of the Cross, as he expounds, in awful, terror-struck words, the "Dark Night of the Soul": "As eyes weakened and clouded by humours suffer pain when the clear light beats upon them, so the soul, by reason of its impurity, suffers exceedingly when the divine light really shines upon it."<sup>1</sup>

If anyone will really ponder on such passages as these, he will rid himself for ever of all notions about mysticism being "pleasant dreaming."

The sense of awe seems to have died out of ordinary English life. Our comfortable theories to the effect that "somehow everything will be all right in the end," however deplorable the beginning and the middle may have been, have deprived us of the capacity even to consider what it must be to a human soul to come face to face, actually in contact with Divine Mysteries. The innate vulgarity of doctrines of equality seems to have quenched in many minds any and every appreciation of a Holy of Holies. How it has come about one cannot say; but the fact remains that there are people who will say in so many words that they have never offended God, and that it is unreal and affected to use such words as "provoking most justly Thy wrath and indignation against us," or "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." As one listens

<sup>1</sup>"The Dark Night of the Soul," page 81. Edited by Father Benedict Zimmermann, O.C.D.



to such blasphemies, which are not hypothetical, the memory hies back to Thompson with his materially beggared life, and his flame-lit, spiritual vision, shrivelling his courage and shaking his very soul:

“Ah, for a heart less native to high Heaven  
A hooded eye for jesses and restraint.”

Does not that contrast between the complacent, self-satisfied materialist and the mendicant visionary convey something of the unbridgeable chasm between sense-knowledge and intuition? All that the English nation has lost by allowing the doctrine of the Communion of Saints to become obscured in this land can only be gauged if we turn back to the earlier chapters of our history, when this country shared with Ireland the name of the Islands of the Saints.

Among all the poets whom England has borne, lovers of Nature as many of them are, has anyone sung with more riotous joy than Thompson of spring's return? He does not admit the awful truth of life because he is a dreary kill-joy; quite the reverse:

“Season enough has Nature to be wise;  
But now distinct, with raiment glittering free,  
Shake she the ringing rafters of the skies  
With festal footing, and bold joyance sweet,  
And let the earth be drunken and carouse!  
For lo, into her house  
Spring is come home with her world-wandering feet,  
And all things are made young with young desires;  
And all for her is light increased  
In yellow stars and yellow daffodils.”

There, in its inexpressible, fresh joy, is the springtime of this lower world, of this material earth, at the moment of her most entrancing charm. As the poem passes on to that strange life with which the whole world is instinct in the perfect days of spring, the tangible beauty changes, for those who have the power of mystic apprehension, and slips into the super-sensual sphere:

“ What little noises stir and pass  
From blade to blade along the voluble grass!  
O Nature, never-done,  
Ungaped-at Pentecostal miracle,  
We hear thee, each man in his proper tongue.”

Were ever borrowed words, like these last six, used more daringly, or with apter high suggestion?

Those who are prone to over-emphasise the kinship between Patmore and Thompson might recall the former's feeling for the inherent sadness of spring in “The Unknown Eros,” in the first book, in the lines on S. Valentine's Day, those which begin—“O baby spring.” Patmore's is the rarer note in English poetry, for the intrinsic, plangent *tristesse* hidden beneath, but not concealed by, the apparent joy and abounding power of spring, seems to strike but few. Those few can hardly break free from it, can hardly close their inner eyes to that poignant vision within a glorious pomp of external paraphernalia.

But, from time to time, at any rate, Patmore

"saw" in this solitary fashion. As dissimilar to the received view is his line on "Winter":

"It is not death but plenitude of peace."<sup>1</sup>

But then Ashdown Forest, the country round Heron's Ghyll where Patmore had his Sussex home, owns a unique peace in mid-winter, a still, rich, vital content which is its own signal possession. If anyone doubt this, let him go and spend winters there before the money-be-mused, jerry builder lastingly ruins one of the fairest places on English ground.

Mr Meynell quotes a remark of Mr Wilfrid Blunt, designed to challenge Thompson's close acquaintance with Nature.<sup>2</sup> It is, no doubt, odd that a lover of Nature did not know an oak from an elm; but, after all, he was brought up in Manchester, and the remark of an educated Mancunian, translated to the Cambridge "Backs": "I had no idea before that the *stems* of trees differed," is not apocryphal, but the maker of it still lives. Whether Thompson really was ignorant of "the names of the commonest flowers of the field," or whether that part of him was absent, wandering, otherwise employed when his host would fain have trapped him into exactness, we shall never know now. But anyone who has even once assisted at the mysteries of spring in any fair country place will have no doubt of Thompson's profound

<sup>1</sup> "The Unknown Eros," book ii.

<sup>2</sup> "Life," page 131, footnote.

knowledge of the deeper side of Nature, if he will read "From the Night of Forebeing." After all, the names of plants and trees, even of the commonest, are only a dodge of human convenience; they have no connexion with realities. But it is far more than a great poem of natural beauty; from underneath its exquisite imagery flashes out the vision of the Mystic who bids men

"Hark to the *jubilate* of the bird  
For them that found the dying way to life."

The young world swims in light; all the visible, tangible scheme of things palpitates with the heady joy, the surging vitality of spring:

"Earth's bosom pants, and heaves her scarfing sea."

Then again, in the midst of the physical, palpable glory of material things, breaks in the Mystic's refrain:

". . . all the firsts are hauntings of some last,  
And all the springs are flash-lights of one spring."

Through the glories of the resurgent life there comes to him

". . . the hid, hugged, swaddled bliss,"

and

". . . this aghast surprise of keenest panging."

Thompson, true to the spirit of the self-imposed reserve with which he started out on his

high emprise, lets fall but the vaguest hint of the substance of his vision :

“ I, in this house so rifted, marred

I yet have sight beyond the smoke,  
And kiss the gods' feet though they wreak  
Upon me stroke and again stroke.”

And so, at last, in English poetry we have once more the mysticism of the devout Catholic, even though it be shrouded in a devout reserve, withheld in a spirit of delicatest reverence by him who, having revealed what it was lawful for a man to utter, shielded himself in the antinomian phrase :

“ This song is sung and sung not : and its words are sealed.”

No one will ever realise quite the insistent purpose of Thompson in these “ Poems of Sight and Insight,” who has not read, or who, having read, does not endorse, his passionate entreaty to the Church to recall, to bring home Poetry the wanderer, Poetry the sinner ; to restore her to her old place as “ lesser sister and helpmate of the Church.”<sup>1</sup> What a ringing, sob-pierced appeal it is : “ Fathers of the Church (we would say) pastors of the Church, pious laics of the Church, you are taking from its walls the panoply of Aquinas ; take also from its walls the psaltery of Alighieri.” He bids the authoritative teachers of the Church to bring to mind S. Francis : “ Sworn to poverty he forswore not beauty, but

<sup>1</sup> Shelley, “ Collected Works,” vol. iii., page 1.

discerned through the lamp beauty the Light God."

Was ever the secret of genuine mysticism revealed more clearly than in that last phrase? What has not been lost to English poetry by the long dominance of that harsh form of puritanism which scouted all beauty, and stood aghast at the spirits of light and joy?

"Through the lamp beauty the Light God." Vaughan, Crashaw and Traherne knew that; Wordsworth held the lamp close to his heart and lived in the reflection of the light; Browning strove and wrestled to reach the far-off radiance. But if we add to these Blake and Patmore, of what other English poets, save these illumined seven, can we say as much before the coming of Thompson?—in whose awakened ears rang the mystic direction

"Pierce thy heart to find the key."

## EPILOGUE

IF one Mystic have excelled all others in treating the difficult subject of illumination, surely it is, with perhaps the single exception of S. John of the Cross, Johann Ruysbroeck. There are two wonderful passages in "Le Miroir du Salut Éternel" which, apprehending that that most beautiful book, even in its accessible form,<sup>1</sup> is not read by many, I will venture to transcribe:

"Tout d'abord la sainte Écriture nous enseigne que Dieu le Père céleste a créé tous les hommes à son image et à sa ressemblance, son image, c'est son Fils, sa propre sagesse éternelle. . . ."

"C'est d'après cette image éternelle que nous avons tous été créés. Car dans la partie la plus haute de notre âme, au centre de nos puissances supérieures, nous sommes constitués à l'état de miroir vivant et éternel de Dieu; nous y portons gravée son image éternelle et aucune autre image n'y peut jamais entrer. Sans cesse, ce miroir demeure sous les yeux de Dieu participant

<sup>1</sup> "Œuvres de Ruysbroeck l'Admirable." Traduits du Flamand par les Bénédictins de Saint—Paul de Wisques. (Vromant et Cie, 3 rue de la Chapelle, Bruxelles, 3 fr. 50.)

ainsi avec l'image qui y est gravée à l'éternité même de Dieu."

It is difficult to conceive of an image which could better suggest the nature of illumination than Ruysbroeck's—" nous sommes constitués à l'état de miroir vivant et éternel de Dieu," *the condition of a living, eternal mirror of God*.

A little further on he elaborates his description of the human soul: " La première propriété de l'âme, c'est une nudité essentielle, sans images; par là nous ressemblons à et nous sommes unis au Père et à sa nature divine.

" La seconde propriété peut être appelée la raison supérieure de l'âme; c'est un miroir de clarté, où nous recevons le Fils de Dieu, la vérité éternelle. Par cette clarté, nous lui sommes semblables; mais dans l'acte de recevoir, nous sommes un avec lui.

" La troisième propriété, nous l'appelons l'étincelle de l'âme: c'est une tendance intime et naturelle de l'âme, vers sa source et c'est là que nous recevons le Saint-Esprit, la charité de Dieu."<sup>1</sup>

These closing words recall Ruysbroeck's wonderful and daring description in another of his writings:

" Car concevoir et comprendre Dieu au-dessus de toutes les similitudes, tel qu'il est en lui-même, c'est être Dieu avec Dieu, sans intermédiaire et sans différence qui puisse devenir obstacle ou intermédiaire. . . . Et c'est pourquoi, celui

<sup>1</sup> " Le Miroir du Salut Éternel," chapter viii.



qui veut comprendre ceci doit être mort à lui-même, et vivre en Dieu, et il tournera sa face vers la lumière éternelle au fond de son esprit, là où se manifeste, sans intermédiaire, l'occulte vérité. Car le Père céleste veut que nous soyons voyants, car il est père de la lumière et c'est pourquoi il dit éternellement sans intermédiaire et sans interruption, au plus secret de notre esprit, un mot unique et abyssal et nul autre. Et en ce mot, il se profère lui-même et toutes choses. Et ce mot n'est autre que *Voyez*."<sup>1</sup>

This effort to convey his own vision of Ruysbroeck, the illuminated servant of GOD, is, of course, only an elaboration of that wonderful and terse promise which Our Lord made, and which, it is hardly too much to say, falls often on ears blunted by that inattention accorded to a constantly repeated phrase: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see GOD."

But, whether in the longer or the shorter form, there it is, one everlasting condition of, one vital pre-essential to vision—purity of heart. What we are taught by all the Mystics, after Our Lord has taught them, we see carried out in real life. As a matter of literal fact, as a verifiable truth of history, the seers are those who in one way or another have obeyed the injunction, "Wash you, make you clean."

The other essential, it is hardly necessary to say, is love; and this contributes to the essential purity: "*Sicut ignis consumit ligna, sic caritas*

<sup>1</sup> "L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles," Book III., chapter i.

*vitia extinguit*,"<sup>1</sup> wrote Thomas à Kempis. Nor does he emphasise less that purity which issues from self-abnegation: "*Cito et libere ad Deum anima pura pergit et super omnia mundi condita evolat, quæ in terris nil commodi vel honoris concupiscit*."<sup>2</sup>

It is nowise fitting for mere mortals to be judging one another idly and to no purpose: "If thou wilt ask how good is he or she, ask how much he or she loves; and that no man can tell. For I hold it folly to judge a man's heart; that none knows save God."<sup>3</sup>

Yet perhaps for the purpose of making clear a spiritual truth it is even permissible to try to estimate the real aspect of that side of a man's life which he has made, at any rate, partly public. If we do thus much, without trespassing beyond the limits of charity and respect, we shall see that all these poets of whom we have thought had no inconsiderable measure of purity of heart. About Henry Vaughan there clings a limpid simplicity, an ingenuous, child-like whiteness of spirit. Wordsworth reminds one of the wholesome cleanliness of unsullied, unspoilt nature. Browning surely exhibited that kind of strong cleanliness to which soils do not and will

<sup>1</sup> "As fire burns wood so love destroys vice."—"Hortulus Rosarum," chapter xiii., verse 4.

<sup>2</sup> "Quickly and freely the pure soul goes to God, and flies up above all the world's treasures, desiring on earth neither reward nor honour." "Hortulus Rosarum," chapter xiii., verse 5.

<sup>3</sup> "The Form of Perfect Living," chapter x. By Richard Rolle.

not adhere, that which belonged to his own Pompilia:

“ . . . God's gift of a purity of soul  
That will not take pollution.”

And Thompson, though his outward circumstances were less calculated, as men calculate, to favour the mystical life, yet scared to that burning, glowing love of spiritual things which, like a flame, devours all extrinsic, clogging deficiency or failure.

One can go further afield than these four men, startlingly dissimilar as they are, and it is well to do so in an age of puritanical materialism which on one hand denies the existence of sin, and on the other, if the consequences of sin be forced on it, is merciless to the sinner.

Huysmans draws a memorable picture of illumination after Durtal had, with unutterable agony, suffered “*la nuit obscure*”; a dark night indeed, set out with all this writer's relentless skill in the analysis of sin and pain.

After Communion, as he walked in the grounds of the monastery, he saw what he certainly took to be a vision. All readers of “*En Route*” will remember the overmastering misery which held the great sinner in fetters until he at last brought himself to the necessary purgation: they cannot forget the Mass in the chapel, and Durtal's Communion after his penitence and absolution. Then, when he returned to the garden which had witnessed so much of his mortal struggle and silent anguish:

"Alors, doucement, sans effets sensibles, le Sacrament agit; le Christ ouvrit peu à peu ce logis fermé et l'aéra: le jour entra à flots chez Durtal."

There it is, the mystical experience, "sans effets *sensibles*." No one can possibly accuse Huysmans of any incapacity in the matter of analysis; we all, who have read "En Route," have shared in that dreadful "dark night" of shame and sin which obscured his spiritual being, in the still darker night of numbing, formless, inexplicable pain as he tore his soul from the fetters with which he had bound it. Yet, with equal power, Huysmans can describe the inner vision, when purgation had opened the way for illumination, overflowing, as it were, the full soul, flooding into the external garden; and this overflowing, of course, took "sensible" shape, and is described in terms of the five senses. All the while, however, we realise that it is a spiritual, supernatural experience, which illumines, transfigures, penetrates essentially into every visible, tangible object, into every one of those which had grown so familiar to him in its everyday, natural aspect: "Sa vision de Nature se modifia . . . l'éclairage soudain de son âme se répercuta sur les alentours"—there is the precise actual fact. "Ces allées, ces bois qu'il avait tant parcourus . . . lui apparurent sous un autre aspect." Even the Calvary is changed, vitalised to him by his inner illumination: "Les arbres bruissaient, tremblant dans un souffle de prières, s'inclinaient devant le Christ qui ne tordait plus ses bras douloureux dans le miroir

de l'étang, mais qui étreignait ces eaux, les éployait contre lui en les bénissant."

Then, a little later, comes a daring image, which recalls "The Orient Ode" of Thompson: "Le ciel s'entr'ouvrit, de son tabernacle de nuages en sortit un clair soleil semblable à un monstrance d'or en fusion, à un Saint Sacrement de flammes. C'était un Salut de la Nature." Its supernatural nature Huysmans leaves in no manner of doubt. These things do not happen to all and sundry; not all men can know them, and just when they will. They happen to the "pure in heart," whether their purity be that of innocence or whether it be that restored purity with which the travel-stained, sin-smirched soul can be clothed if only it will tread the painful path of purging: "Durtal regardait, transporté. . . . Dieu seul avait le pouvoir de gorger ainsi une âme, de la faire déborder et ruisseler en des flots de joie; et, lui seul pouvait aussi combler la vasque des douleurs, comme aucun événement de ce monde ne le savait faire."

And we may note, by a final quotation, that this vision was no mere sentimentality; Huysmans bids us recollect what had preceded it, the direful shame, the tense misery, the "sensible" fire of pain-wrung remorse which had made such illumination possible: "Durtal venait de l'expérimenter: la souffrance et la liesse spirituelles atteignaient, sous l'épreinte divine, une acuité que les gens les plus humainement heureux ou malheureux ne soupçonnent même pas."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "En Route," pages 377-379. By J. K. Huysmans.

It is quite probable that some may urge that if this be genuine illumination, and not a mere trick of a literary artist, yet Huysmans—or, if we prefer so to call him, Durtal—was, at any rate, not “pure in heart.” They will say that by his own confession he had sinned grossly, deliberately.

I have perhaps somewhat forestalled the answer to this, but it can be elaborated. The present generation, devoid as it often appears to be of any genuine consciousness of personal and grave sin, is still more inclined to brush away the reality and necessity of repentance in those cases where wickedness is so patent that it is sheer futility to deny it. Confession, so the Church has ever proclaimed, is a step, a great and important step along the path of penitence; and penitence, as not a few of us know, like Durtal—“Durtal venait de l’expérimenter”—is still a reality, and not at all necessarily a self-advantageous hypocrisy, whatever a sceptical generation may choose to say it thinks on the matter. Sometimes one wonders whether there have slipped from the world’s short, shallow memory all remembrance of the man called Augustine. More probably those who might seem to have forgotten have conceived the queer, stupid notion that things which may quite well have happened in North Africa in the fourth century most certainly would not occur in Paris in the nineteenth. Yet the spiritual world reckons nothing of our temporal and spatial sunderings.

There is nothing incredible in the fact that

Huysmans should have experienced illumination. Technically he was not a poet nor a saint; but he had more than a touch of the gifts of the first, and no human creature has yet been without potentiality for the state of the second. Coventry Patmore has reminded us that both the saint and the poet can claim illumination in some measure as an essential part of their being: "The Poet is, *par excellence*, the *perceiver*, nothing having any interest for him unless he can, as it were, see and touch it with the spiritual sense with which he is pre-eminently endowed. The Saints indeed seem, for the most part, to have had these senses greatly developed by their holiness and their habitual suppression of the corporal senses."<sup>1</sup>

And so, a study in illumination, not in the saints alone, but in the poets, and in those sharing in poetic genius—these others being, so some may think, nearer to ordinary men and women than the saints—brings us back to the fundamental truth that purgation, in one form or another, precedes and must precede vision; that cleansing paves the way for the entry of light.

Nowadays, when there is a dreamy, loose-knit inclination towards amorphous, indefinite emotion, which people choose to call mysticism, it cannot be said too clearly, perhaps it can hardly be repeated too often, that here again it is, and most emphatically, true, in the somewhat pagan phrase of Erasmus, that "the gods sell us all things for labour." Mysticism is no short

<sup>1</sup> "Religio Poetæ" (Uniform Edition), page 2.

cut to unbought ease, nor is it, as some people seem to fancy, the unearned increment of sentimentality. That should be understood; the sooner the better. Nor is it any flabby feeling or vaporous conclusion from shifting premises. Nor can it, in its essential reality, ever be a matter of popular books or magazine articles; psychology will never find it, and laboratory experiments are out of the question. In spite of many efforts, conscious or unaware, to make it so, it can never really become a fashionable appendage of luxurious life, nor fit into the elaborately cushioned way of the emotional. It is fundamentally, so far as all the beginnings go, a matter of self-stripping; and that, if we will inquire into the Mystics' lives, so often not in any great or manifest way—which to some natures would be in itself a rich satisfaction—but rather a ceaseless giving up of little things too small to be worth thinking about—a persistent, hidden doing of those dull deeds, whose very drabness deprives the performance of them of light, though, of course, sometimes it is also the reward of “those who have done their best by heroic purity and self-humiliation to merit the vision”<sup>1</sup>—a phrase apparently covering greater denials than those of commonplace daily life.

Those “in the endless multitude of men” who have *seen God* are those, and only those, who in one way or another have forgone the ordinary ways of easy-going men; who, though they may

<sup>1</sup> “*Religio Poetæ*,” page 52. By Coventry Patmore.



have had and have carried out the usual duties of workaday life laid on them, have not consumed themselves thereabout, but have known, in longer or shorter intervals, how to withdraw themselves and walk the dire way of purgation, stripping themselves as they went of loose thoughts, vague desires, unhallowed imaginations, and last, lingering reservations.

M. Henri Joly has expressed tersely the difference between sham and genuine mysticism: "Le faux mystique se complaît dans les raffinements de ses aspirations personnelles, dans les subtilités et dans les mystères: le vrai mystique demande la clarté, celle-là même ou celle-là surtout qui met dans tout son jour la nécessité des sacrifices."<sup>1</sup> So few of us seem really able to realise the disabling power over our spiritual life, of our conscious or unconscious reservations. We will give much; but that is of no avail finally. God asks *all*. "*Sicut non sufficeret tibi omnibus habitis præter me; ita nec mihi placere poterit, quidquid dederis, te non oblato. Offer te mihi, et da te totum pro Deo, et erit accepta oblatio.*"<sup>2</sup>

*Da te totum.* It is easy to write; it is incredibly hard to do, when it means "all"; e.g. loss of livelihood, loss of friends, general, if

<sup>1</sup> "Psychologie des Saints," page 147. By Henri Joly.

<sup>2</sup> "As it would not suffice thee to have all things whatsoever besides Me: so neither can it please Me, whatsoever thou givest, if thou offerest not thyself. Offer up thyself unto Me, and give thyself wholly for God, and thy oblation shall be accepted."—"Imitatio," IV. viii. 2.

undeserved, reprobation, the patient endurance of a position easily riddled with ridicule, and the twisting into shamefulness of one's sincerest motives and endeavours: yet, for not a few it has meant that in the past; it may come to mean that for some of us. It is difficult to believe that it would not be a great deal better for the so-called modern mind to embark on self-surrender, to train its will to give up its own stubborn desires, than to agitate itself about translating fundamental Catholic doctrines into "the terms of modern thought." Self-surrender has, in the past, proved a more hopeful path to holiness than "self-expression" has shown itself able to provide. Yet self-expression, the apotheosis of the wavering opinions of its own passing day, is, nowadays, many a man's and woman's wilfully chosen path of seeking gain.

The lesson of entire surrender, which is so familiar to us in the pages of Thomas à Kempis, is emphasised by that other great saint, S. Vincent de Paul. To his company of Sisters of Charity he insisted: "I tell you that you will never be true Sisters of Charity until you have sifted all your motives, have rooted up every evil habit, and stamped out every personal desire."

If anyone will shrug his shoulders and say, "That may be all very well for a 'religious,' but it is plainly ludicrous for people 'in the world,'" then let him listen to S. Vincent de Paul's recent biographer: "As for the great lady, it was a matter of obligation that she should not cling to her jewels while her neighbours died for lack of

bread, so for the man or woman who had entered on the special service of Christ there could be no reservations."<sup>1</sup>

No reservations! it being true for all time into Eternity that he who wills to save his life must first of all lose it.

A recent book by Père Lamballe (which is a reprint of essays originally contributed to "*L'Ami du Clergé*") has been translated lately into English under the title "*Mystical Contemplation*." Père Lamballe insists upon detachment as the one vital pre-essential to mystical contemplation; and he buttresses his plea by many cogent quotations, the greater number, as anyone might surmise, from S. John of the Cross. Probably there is no single lesson which the world to-day needs to learn more, and is more unwilling to learn, than this simple fact of the impossibility to any real follower of Christ of making reservations. The desire to pick and choose, the obsession of judging for themselves, whether or no they have taken the smallest pains to train and develop that judgment, seem ingrained in English people: we will offer this, that, or the other sacrifice, which perhaps is not demanded at all; we will go thus far, and sometimes it may be quite a considerable distance out of our way; we will submit up to this limit, and it may be one above the average practice of our fellows; and so forth—but there we stop dead. That, whatever else it may be, is not the spirit of

<sup>1</sup> Vincent de Paul," pages 17, 18. By E. K. Sanders.

Christianity. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny——" What? "Himself!" There it stands for all time as the one condition. We say the words so glibly. We listen to them a hundred times so placidly. And then one day, how or why we know not, the conviction bursts on us, and will never more be gainsaid, that denying oneself means at least willingness to part with the very last reservation. We may not always be called upon to do it; but while we say to ourselves, or whisper in the depths of our hearts, "Anything but that," the whole battle is still to fight.

Yet the Catholic religion is all-sided, and covers all truth, all men, all things. Therefore it is always to be remembered that Catholic teaching is that pain is not, in and for itself, an "end" for Christian men, only an essential and salutary means, first for cleansing, and secondly surely to bring our faltering, recalcitrant human souls into close touch at last with the "Suffering Servant," Who was also Lord of all things visible and invisible. The modern world often denies the reality of sin, and shrinks in horror from pain, all the while, with curious inconsistency, showing itself not quite courageous enough to fling the word Christian to the winds. Yet, as a plain matter of fact, sin is rampant; as a plain truth of historical record, Christianity is built on sacrifice. If sacrifice be taken out of the Gospels and Epistles, if it be cleared out of the Apocalypse of S. John the Divine, if it be strained out from the writings of the Doctors

and Fathers of the Church, then there is no core left in the Christian religion. It is, it always has been, sacrifice, pain, which disciplines saints and weans sinners from the clogging bonds of shame.

But the world in which we live to-day holds up before us a totally different ideal. That world which affects to reverence Our Lord, which indulges in high-flown rhapsodies over S. Francis as he flung his rich clothes in his astounded parent's face and fared forth to poverty and to instant and incessant toil—that world, double-minded as perhaps it has never been so extravagantly so before, begs us, tempts us, one by one, to practise ease, to compromise truth, to yield a point here and a position there, to remember how wrong and impolitic it is to be “violent”—even though we were once told on the highest authority that “the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force” (*beata violentia*, S. Ambrose called it); the world of to-day pleads with us to forget an ambiguous future in the joys of a certain secure present. As we hear the subtle temptation, pressed with a thousand ingenious and alluring wiles, as fatigue of mind and body, as the ever-present restlessness of doubt, and as the utter weariness and futility of contending further with a dense, complacent world, shutting its eyes to pain and denying the reality of sin, add to the tempters' strength, suddenly, scattering the mists and darkness with its clarion courage, the ringing appeal of Thomas à Kempis recalls us to

ourselves: "*Tota vita Christi crux fuit et martyrium: et tu tibi quæris requiem et gaudium?*"<sup>1</sup>

We cannot realise too soon that our ideals in this age of soulless wealth and irresistible machinery have all gone astray. The reckless power inherent in wealth, where its use is unrestrained by high principle, together with the extension of mechanical invention and the apparently boundless possibilities of scientific discovery, have for the time upset our spiritual balance. In their newly acquired relative power many men and not a few women have seemed to forget their absolute impotence. As they have found themselves seemingly able to go anywhere, buy everything, and do what they will, the fact that they have not one iota of power even to prolong and continue their own personal lives for one single second seems blotted from their recollection; they feel so strong that they appear to overlook their essential and irremovable dependence. In this riotous orgy of power and comfort, the warnings of the great masters of the spiritual life—of Thomas à Kempis as he writes the bitter-sweet phrase, "*Sine dolore non vivitur in amore*," or of Blaise Pascal, as he reminds us of the institution of the Paschal ritual: "*Pour marquer toujours qu'on ne pouvait trouver la joie que par l'amertume*"—fall on heedless or defiant ears.

So engrossed have many of us become in

<sup>1</sup> "The whole life of Christ was a cross and martyrdom: and dost thou ask rest and joy for thyself?"—"Imitatio," II. xii. 7.

materialism that if we care, and even suffer a little for righteousness' sake, we still are over-prone to think of the whole matter as one of loss and gain; the possibilities of reward and punishment still loom too large in our spiritual life. Perhaps, after all, no small measure of illumination may be needed to reach the selfless heights of S. Francis Xavier:

"Cur igitur non amem te  
O JESU amantissime!  
Non ut in cœlo salves me,  
Aut ne æternum damnes me,  
"Nec præmii ullius spe.  
Sed sicut tu amasti me,  
Sic amo et amabo te;  
Solum quia Rex meus es,  
Et solum quia Deus es."

Because of this modern hatred of prophylactic pain, it has seemed worth while to try to bring home to ordinary men and women, misled by a shallow philosophy into over-confidence in their five senses, or choked as to their spiritual capacities by the insistent luxury of a material age, the plain facts of intuition and of illumination. And it seemed worth while to try to show it mainly

<sup>1</sup>Translated "Hymns Ancient and Modern," 106. S. Francis Xavier after his conversion by S. Ignatius Loyola, was a missionary in the East Indies in the sixteenth century. It would be interesting to know if he ever met with the following aspiration of a saintly mystical Moslem woman of the eighth century, Râbi'a, whose words in his "Mystics of Islam," page 115, Dr Nicholson quotes as follows: "O God, if I worship Thee in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not Thine everlasting beauty!"

by the circumstances belonging to some of our own English poets, partly because, in spite of our constant touring and our Cook's tickets, we are an oddly insular nation, and partly because the plain person, while he only misdoubts a poet, as a rule, actually fights shy of a saint.

And now, in conclusion, I should wish to urge that what the Poet sees in part, the Saint sees in a glorious whole; and I should like to press home the point which I made at the outset of this chapter, that the condition of such "sight" is *purity*. In other words I would plead the dependence of illumination on purgation. If that absolute dependence can be established and demonstrated, then the fable that mysticism is a primrose path of individual pleasant choice, of picking and choosing always on the sunny side of life, is exploded.

I suppose it would be generally believed—whether it be true or not I am not concerned here to settle—that women are as a rule more sentimental than men; and that the Southern and Latin races are more so than the Northern and Teutonic. Setting aside—so disquieting for any such theory as they must be—the lurking possibilities of German manhood, let us accept the hypothesis as passably true for the moment, and look round for a woman saint of Latin extraction. Possibly S. Teresa will serve our turn. She was certainly a woman; the only one, I believe, who was ever called a Doctor of the Church, and Spain is sufficiently Southern and Latin.

Besides her own "Autobiography," many



"lives" of this saint have been published. My present object is no such unnecessary feat as adding to their number; but rather I would use these well-known facts of her life, personality, and writings to establish the thesis—which in these days of undisciplined self-pleasing is more than worth setting forth—that a sane and extremely human woman can be an illuminated saint; that visions, though not of the essence of sanctity, and though sometimes of diabolic origin, can be and have been heavenly revelations; that the genuine Mystic is no headlong and contumacious upsetter of order, but a humble servant of the Church Catholic, obeying laws, and living by Sacraments; and, lastly, that sanctity is not the wild and unlikely goal of a few eccentric mortals, nor the lonely lot of a spiritual aristocracy, but is the proper end of passionate, pleasure-loving, sin-bound humanity, if it only will tread the one path which leads to GOD, the path of unreserved self-surrender.

"How sweet are Thy ways, O Lord! yet who can travel by them without dread?"<sup>1</sup> If any sort of justification be needed for this choice of S. Teresa, as a guide, it can be found in the following passage from the brief which Leo XIII. addressed to Père Marcel Bouix (the translator into French of the Saint's "Autobiography"): "Les ouvrages de la grande Thérèse contiennent une certaine force plus voisine du ciel que

<sup>1</sup> "Meditations of the Soul on its God," page 77. Minor Works of S. Teresa: translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook.

de la terre, une force merveilleusement efficace pour la réforme de la vie, en sorte qu'ils sont lus avec fruit non seulement par ceux qui s'appliquent à la direction des âmes ou qui aspirent à une éminente sainteté, mais encore par tout homme qui s'occupe un peu sérieusement du salut de son âme." He was but elaborating the words of the prayer proper to her Feast on the 15th of October: "*Exaudi nos, Deus salutaris noster, ut sicut de beatæ Teresiæ Virginis tuæ festivitate gaudemus; ita cœlestis ejus doctrinæ pabulo nutriamur, et piæ devotionis erudiamur affectû. Per Dominum,*" etc.

So, first of all, I will try to prove from her own writings that S. Teresa was extraordinarily "wholesome," natural, and, in the truest sense, a woman; and withal a woman of delightful wit, practical common sense, and good business capacity—for it is a disastrous misapprehension which has seized hold of the popular mind, that a saint, even to be or become such, must of necessity be made of quite different stuff from, and particularly of much more excitable and unreliable stuff than, the rest of mankind. And then I will try to show how, following slowly and painfully the purgative way, she won by sure degrees to the vision splendid.

If anyone will try to argue from the mere fact of S. Teresa's having written her "Autobiography," that she was and must have been an egotist, he can only do it by overlooking entirely the circumstances of its production. She simply wrote it, as S. Francis would have all things

done "in holy obedience." She would have preferred not to write it; being commanded to do so, she would have desired to record with faithful minuteness all those sins, shortcomings, and infidelities which, as she looked back, seemed to her sometimes to obscure her whole life and all its doings; but as she says, simply, in her preface, "with regard to such admissions extreme reserve is imposed on me."

Pope Urban VIII., fearing that even what she had said might be misunderstood, declared, when the first office in honour of S. Teresa was presented to him: "*Sancta Teresia numquam commisit peccatum mortale*";<sup>1</sup> and this judgment was repeated by those whose business it was to prepare the Report for her Canonisation. And yet one moving sentence in her own Preface to the "Autobiography," a sentence from the pen of a woman whom the most searching examination left, at least, unconvicted of mortal sin, may well give pause to those easygoing mortals who, living without qualms or self-examination, seem, at any rate, abundantly sure that GOD must be as well pleased with them as they apparently are with themselves: "May He be for ever blessed for waiting so long for me."

We know, from the story of her gallant effort at the age of seven to seek martyrdom in company with her brother Rodrigo—an enterprise frustrated by an intervening uncle—that she was not a thoughtless nor irreligious child; a fact

<sup>1</sup> "Vie de Sainte Thérèse," page 2. Traduite par le Rev. Père Marcel Bouix.

which is further indicated by her action when, being herself but twelve, her mother died. S. Teresa tells us that in her grief she threw herself at the feet of a statue of Our Lady, uttering a tearful entreaty that she should henceforth be her mother. "This cry of a simple heart was heard," she adds. But yet, despite such youthful piety, she was as a young woman impatient of restraint, eager for mundane pursuits—in a word anything but *dévoté*. She was, and it is for some of us a most encouraging fact, never a saint because worldly joys elicited no response from her; they did, only too much, so she assures us. She attributed this temporary lapse to her habit of reading chivalrous romances, which, as we know, were more than a fashion in sixteenth-century Spain; and this tendency was furthered by the untoward influence of an elder sister.

It seems profitable to emphasise these facts, on which she dwells in the second chapter of her "Autobiography," because the world is, as has been observed, over prone to imagine that the "saints" are composed of some peculiar stuff and are constitutionally immune from the tastes, failings, and desires of ordinary humanity. If S. Teresa's "Autobiography" shows one thing quite plainly, it is that to her the struggle to detach herself from the world, to surrender her will wholly, was severe and bitter. Help came to her, as she relates in the third chapter, in the Augustinian Convent of Notre-Dame de Grâce, where she became a boarder for a year and a half. But it did not come at once; as she naïvely

remarks: "For the first eight days I was cruelly bored." She was no "plaster saint." All the same, her discomfort arose in part already from remorse for the giddy ways into which, setting at naught her father's wishes, she had fallen; and it so happened that the nun, whose happy fortune it was to retrieve her, hit on that which is of necessity, and not upon any mere irrelevant detail, viz. upon the essentialness of self-surrender. This nun, Maria Briceño, a member of the nobility of Avila, had herself resolved on the religious life in consequence of reading, presumably in one of those moments when what we read actually penetrates our inmost will, words which surely she must have often enough heard before: "Many are called, but few are chosen."

The subject of their conversations seems to have been GOD's rewards for those who give up everything for His sake. These conversations bore fruit; and she tells us that, at last, this nun reawakened in her the thought of and wish for spiritual things; then follows the avowal, strange as it may seem to some in the mouth of the great reformer of the Carmelite Order: "Little by little she undermined my repulsion from the religious life, a repulsion I had felt so strongly."

When, after eighteen months, she left this convent, she stayed for a while with an uncle whose influence was all in the same direction, whose example and words, so she records, recalled her youthful tendency to piety, and impressed her anew with the worthlessness of merely worldly pleasure. But still the battle was

far from won: "Terror seized me when I reflected that had death come it would have found me on the way to hell. In spite of that, my will could not resolve on the religious life." Yet, for all that, she could not divest herself of the conviction that this life which repelled her, from which her every natural inclination recoiled, was "the most perfect, the safest." Therefore, "little by little," so she tells us, "I resolved to force myself to embrace it." This struggle was carried on for three months.

There is some doubt as to the precise date when she took the habit. Some evidence suggests that she was nineteen; but she herself, in 1575, wrote in a letter that she had taken the habit forty years before, which would make her age twenty-one.

It is possible that some people may argue that since she had to "force" herself to resolve to enter a convent she must have lacked "vocation," but it will only be those who imagine that a "call" must necessarily be to *ease*. It is difficult to believe that there could have been any serious failure in her response when she could say of herself, as she does so casually in the fourth chapter, where she is referring to this period of struggle: "As for comfort in life, I took no heed of that." There are not so many mortals who could say that much with any appearance of truth. And lastly, it must be obvious to everyone, that conventual, monastic life would lose half, if not its whole value, were it a course on which any serious person could embark without a grave struggle.

Perhaps this is a sufficient account of her way of entering religion to help to prove the point I wished to establish, viz. that she was constitutionally wholesome, sane, natural, and very truly womanly. There are no traces of false pose, of sentimental posturing; indeed anyone who has realised what she was cannot think of such things in the same breath as of her: the good and the bad are told together in the fashion of that genuine humility so extolled by Madame de Maintenon, that temper of heart which surely brings us to admit just the truth, not hiding the evil, and not denying those fragments of good which may fortunately happen to belong to us. S. Teresa possessed other gifts of a similar kind. In a moment of irritation Erasmus once exclaimed *à propos* of an excellent but dense man: "I would have him to know that dullness is not sanctity." The converse notion that sanctity not only is, but ought to be dull, is not yet slain among us; and so S. Teresa's wit, flashing here and there through the ordinary course of her holy life, illumining her utter poverty, her weak health, and frequent illnesses, her persecuted efforts, her heavy sorrows, is most refreshing; most disconcerting, too, for the advocates of dreary piety.

How funny she is! and so spontaneously funny.

To Lorenzo de Cepeda, the beloved Brother and recipient of some of her most delightful letters, she wrote once<sup>1</sup>: "I send you this hair-shirt. . . . But I send it on this condition, that

<sup>1</sup> In 1577.

you do *not* wear it after you have dressed yourself, nor when you go to bed. . . . I cannot help smiling to see how you send me sweetmeats, delicacies, and money, and I send you a hair-shirt."

Then again there is a world of sly humour in her remark in a letter addressed during 1578 to the Prioress of Seville: "I believe the only defect in the postulant recommended by Father Nicolas is that she is a little too simple."

Sometimes she was quaintly frank to this prioress, Mother Maria de San Joseph. For example, having said how pleased Lorenzo de Cepeda was with the Mother's letter to him, S. Teresa adds: "The letters pleased me likewise, but they were not well written, for the more you try to write legibly the worse you seem to get on!"

The "Autobiography," too, shines throughout its length with her bubbling love of a joke; it enters even into her gravest moments, when she is occupied with the most serious subjects. One of her minor writings, called "Conceptions of the Love of God," is a series of meditations on the selected passages from the "Canticle of Canticles." She has quoted a difficult sentence, and she writes: "I cannot understand this, and I am very glad of it. For the soul ought not so much to contemplate and honour God in those things that our grovelling intellects can master in this life, as in those problems that we cannot solve. When you read a book, or hear a sermon, or meditate on any of the mysteries of our holy faith, if you find you cannot clearly comprehend the matter, I strongly recommend you not to tire



yourselves, nor to strain your minds by puzzling over it, for many of these things are not suited for women—nor men either, very often!"<sup>1</sup>

The gist of this passage is every bit as grave a warning, and on a matter of vital import, as Thomas à Kempis's solemn last chapter in the "Imitation." All the same, S. Teresa ends her exhortation quite naturally and unaffectedly, and also quite convincingly, with a jest. She went a little further in this particular vein of jesting in a letter she wrote in 1576 to the General of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She sent this particular letter in a time of heavy anxieties: she was pleading for pardon for two Fathers who had offended the General, and she ended up with the earnest and witty plea: "For the love of God, then, I beg of your Reverence to grant me this favour . . . though we poor women are not fit persons to give good advice, still sometimes we hit the mark as well as a man."

Closely allied to her wit is that quality of gay common sense which informs the whole of her "Autobiography," and appears so constantly in her letters. Perhaps those who imagine erroneously that religious live always at a strained tension may correct their view when they find S. Teresa quietly remarking to the Prioress of Seville: "I was much pleased that you knit stockings and gain something by your labour. God will help those who help themselves."

It is superfluous to go on elaborating the point

<sup>1</sup> "Minor Works" of S. Teresa, page 114. Translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook.

that S. Teresa was an eminently sane, wholesome, and natural woman. A library of proof would not satisfy those who are obsessed by the belief that every saint is of necessity an hysterical or epileptic person; enough has been adduced to convince ordinary people that this particular saint was emphatically neither the one nor the other.

But now comes the important point. S. Teresa was, as every unbiassed student of her own writings must admit, healthy in mind, endowed with more than common capacity, filled with common sense, bubbling over with gay wit. Yet the way she went was a very hard one. It was along the path of purgation, deliberately chosen and persistently trodden, that she won illumination and union. It was not only that, like every religious, she had to give up her family and the everyday things dear to her—the story of all that I have already lightly sketched; but after she had taken the habit, her way to holiness was obviously, from her own unvarnished account, very hard, it was anything but a uniform ascent in goodness. It was not only very hard, but very long. We, who sometimes find it intolerable to bear discomfort for a short space, must surely be staggered by such quiet phrases as these: “For almost twenty years I sailed this stormy sea”;<sup>1</sup> or again, “I fell, I rose, feebly, no doubt, and then I fell again. Dragging myself along the lowest paths of perfection, I hardly troubled about venial sins, and as for mortal ones, I did not dread them

<sup>1</sup>“Autobiography,” chapter viii.

sufficiently, since I did not avoid dangers."<sup>1</sup> This is a great admission, for any sound theologian will tell us, as, for instance, the Abbot of Buckfast does, that "Nothing could be less Catholic than to speak or think of venial sin lightly. It is a great evil, but an evil that is compatible with the privileges of the children of God."<sup>2</sup>

Surely no one can read this earlier part of S. Teresa's "Autobiography" without realising the clogged, difficult way along which she passed. The recital is so simple, so straightforward, that it is impossible to doubt the facts. And then, more convincing still perhaps, is that kind of invisible but hauntingly real atmosphere of struggle and failure and difficulty, that environment which the reader feels to differ *in toto* from that of the later chapters, which record events after the struggle was "swallowed up in victory."

One more definitely worded passage, clear beyond possibility of contradiction or mistake, may be added as calculated to show the Saint's careful accuracy about precise facts. She is not telling us haphazardly that she suffered vaguely for an indefinite period; she knows what was the matter, and how long it lasted: "I ought, however to admit this: I can, during the course of these years, reckon several months, and sometimes a whole year, of generous faithfulness. Applying myself ardently to mental prayer, I

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," chapter viii.

<sup>2</sup> "The Human Soul," page 142. By Dom Anscar Vonier.

carefully avoided the smallest faults, and I took serious precautions not to offend God. . . . But only a feeble memory of these happy days remains with me; they must doubtless have been much fewer than the bad ones. Still, few passed in which I did not devote some considerable time to mental prayer, except when I was very ill or very busy. When my body was suffering, my soul's union with God was closer. . . . Thus, with the exception of the year I have just mentioned, out of twenty-eight years since I began to practise mental prayer, I spent more than eighteen in this struggle and strife of a soul divided between God and the world."<sup>1</sup>

I have put this first among S. Teresa's sufferings, for it will be obvious to anyone who reads her life in the least sympathetically that to her, herself, it was, as she looked back, far and away the hardest of them. But, as the above passage shows, she was also called upon to bear severe and manifold corporal pains and sufferings. She tells us of pain which seemed like a tearing with sharp teeth, of a fever which could not be stayed, of complete inability to take solid food, of dreadful nausea, of contracting nerves, of a heavy depression, and of temporary paralysis. In mentioning this last she does so with that accuracy which is such a marked trait of all her writings: "For nearly three years I was struck down by paralysis which, however, was getting better every day."<sup>1</sup> How many people would

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," chapter viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter vi.

have added this qualifying phrase when describing such an agglomeration of sufferings and maladies?

Then, again, from her intellectual temperament she suffered a still subtler trouble, not perhaps very great in itself if it had been by itself, but, added to everything else, we can easily realise how it might have appeared to the saint just one of those additional troubles about which we ordinary mortals find ourselves querulously asking: "Why need I have this to bear as well as everything else?" But S. Teresa quietly relates the facts, never questioning the rightness of it all. As it is a rather delicate psychological account, I will give it in Père Bouix's well-known French rendering rather than let it suffer a second translation: "Voici qu'elle était ma manière d'oraison. Je tâchais, autant que je pouvais, de considérer Jésus-Christ, notre bien et notre maître, comme présent au fond de mon âme. Chaque mystère de sa vie que je méditais, je me la représentais ainsi dans ce sanctuaire intérieur. Toutefois, je passais la plus grande partie du temps à lire de bons livres: ils étaient le charme et le rafraîchissement de mon âme. Dieu ne m'a pas donné la talent de discourir avec l'entendement, ni celui de me servir avec fruit de l'imagination. Cette dernière faculté est chez moi tellement inerte que lorsque je voulais me peindre et me représenter en moi-même l'humanité de Notre Seigneur, jamais, malgré tous mes efforts, je ne pouvais en venir à bout.

"A la vérité, l'âme qui ne peut discourir, si

elle persévère, arrive bien plus vite à la contemplation, mais sa voie est très laborieuse et très pénible; car, dès que la volonté ne se trouve pas occupée, et que l'amour ne se porte pas sur un objet présent, cette âme demeure comme sans appui et sans exercice. La solitude et la sécheresse la font beaucoup souffrir, et les pensées lui livrent un terrible combat. A des âmes de cette trempe, il faut plus de pureté de conscience qu'à celles qui peuvent agir avec l'entendement. . .

"Jamais, durant tout ce temps, excepté quand je venais de communier, je n'osai d'aborder l'oraison sans un livre. Sans lui, mon âme éprouvait le même effroi que si elle avait eu à lutter seule contre une multitude ennemie; l'ayant à côté de moi, j'étais tranquille. C'était une compagnie, c'était de plus un bouclier sur lequel je recevais les coups des pensées importunes qui venaient troubler mon oraison. D'ordinaire, je n'étais point dans la sécheresse, mais jamais je n'y échappais quand je me trouvais sans livre; soudain mon âme se troublait et mes pensées s'égarèrent. Avec mon livre, je les rappelais doucement, et par cette attrayante amorce, j'attirais, je gouvernais facilement, mon âme."<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who desires really to understand St Teresa's account of the mystical way must read again and again the chapters eleven to twenty-two in her "Autobiography." It will be well worth their while, more particularly if they themselves have any addiction to a dreamy, self-

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," chapter iv.

directed, amorphous mysticism, to compare carefully with this passage which I have just quoted, the pages in Chapter XXII, where she denounces in burning words the errors into which she fell, through reading mystical authors, or perhaps, one should say, writers upon mysticism, who advised travellers by the way to detach themselves from every sort of corporeal image, and to try to rise to a conception of the immaterial Deity. In a wonderful apostrophe to Our Lord, she cries to Him for pardon, because, through the leading of others, she for a while put away crucifix and pictures. "How could I, Lord, have the idea, even for one single hour, that Thou couldst be to me an obstacle in the path of any greater good?"

As at the outset she retained her book, so in the height of mystical contemplation she learned to shun the dreamy advice, resumed and thenceforward kept on her own fit way, with crucifix and picture.

The difference between the spiritual practicalness of this great saint and the diaphanous raptures of some other seekers has a significance which it would perhaps be difficult to overestimate. It is not very easy to convey the precise point; possibly it is the intense vivid reality of Teresa de Jesus which makes her so irresistible, so ungainsayable. For I think it must be admitted that in the case of S. Teresa we find ourselves in the presence of a singularly impressive power. It strikes us as crude when people who do not seem to understand the obvious

uses of a crucifix, of pictures, speak of them as materialising the spiritual. S. Teresa not merely reversed this process, and spiritualised the material, but her rich nature rose to the feat of synthesising seeming opposites: she broke down the petty barriers raised by the inadequacy and faultiness of human language, and pierced through the apparent to the hidden; nay, more, she perceived their imperishable relations; like Plato's philosopher she, if anyone has, "saw things together," and therefore rejected none.

We ought to remember that here we have to do with one who by her own confession found it specially difficult to make real to herself the fact of Our Lord's humanity. I have just quoted the passage where she says that she was so deficient in imagination (she used the word in its right sense of forming an image of some person or thing) "that when I wanted to depict or represent to myself Our Lord's humanity, I never could, with my utmost efforts, succeed."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this power of hers of intertwining the material representation with the spiritual apprehension is all the more remarkable. No one could write more emphatically than she does in her twenty-second chapter: she declares that according to the mystical writers whom she has cited, "what one ought to endeavour to do is to consider oneself in an enclosure, surrounded on all sides by God, and lost in Him as in an abyss." Then she adds: "That seems to me a good thing sometimes; but

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," chapter iv.



to cut oneself off wholly from Jesus Christ, to reckon His Divine Body among our difficulties, to put it on a plane with other creatures, that I could never tolerate."<sup>1</sup>

To turn to another matter, from the extracts which I have already given it is easy to see that S. Teresa suffered from three quite different painful conditions, conditions which were dependent on her own personality. As to her troubles which arose from or through other people, they may be dealt with later.

Probably most people, if they think about the saints at all, and yet have not thought about them carefully, entertain a strange notion that they were (for so many people speak of saints only in the past tense) in some unexplained fashion quite different from ordinary people, and that being holy somehow "came natural to them," whatever that may mean. If such thinkers can give their minds to the actual facts of S. Teresa's earlier years, perhaps they will find her corporeal sufferings the most understandable. It has become so common of late years to dismiss the greatest and holiest men and women of the past as epileptics, hysterical subjects, semi-insane, over-strung mortals, that it does not trouble the plain man to find that a saint did not always enjoy robust health; rather, that is what he would anticipate. But the struggle to do rightly, to avoid actual sin, to make solid progress in holiness, and that other subtler inability—if he can grasp it at all—de-

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," chapter xxii.

pendent on a failure or lack of discursive understanding and imagination—these surely will stagger the ordinary person. They are so entirely subversive of all cheerful theories about goodness coming natural to the saints, and about their immunity from the faults and failings and weaknesses of the rest of us.

Possibly, it is the very facts set forth by herself, utterly simply, straightforwardly, and convincingly, which make S. Teresa the most encouraging, because she is so thoroughly human, of the saints to us, faulty, feeble, futile mortals as most of us are. After all, a saint to whom holiness were no trouble would not be of much good to us. But S. Teresa has let us see the actual fashioning of a saint, as it really occurred, day by day and year by year. She may have been a wonderful, an unusual woman; but somehow that is not the aspect she contrives to present most frequently. The picture is rather of a woman with many failings, great gifts and some deficiencies, who, by the Grace of God and her own persistent efforts to use it, did at last, not by any means at first, reach her goal. Undoubtedly she learned to excel in the one supremely necessary quality, self-surrender. But that did not come easily nor quickly: "a struggle and strife of a soul divided between God and the world," those are her own words descriptive of the earlier years. It is an irresistible temptation to put close by them the beautiful stanzas of a poem which, so we are told in the latest edition of her "*Minor Works*,"

"is undoubtedly by S. Teresa." The date is not given, but it seems clear, from the "Autobiography," that her poems belong to her later life, the seventies of the sixteenth century. S. Vincent de Paul could demand no more utter surrender than these stanzas convey :

"Bestow long life, or straightway bid me die;  
Let health be mine, or pain and sickness send,  
With honour or dishonour; be my path  
Beset by war or peaceful to the end.  
My strength or weakness be as Thou shalt choose,  
For naught Thou askest shall I e'er refuse—  
I only wish what Thou wilt have of me.

Give contemplation if Thou wilt, or let  
My lonely soul in dryness ever pine;  
Abundance and devotion be the gift  
Thou choosest, or a sterile soul be mine!  
O Majesty Supreme, in naught apart  
From Thy decree can I find peace of heart!  
Say what it is, Lord, Thou dost wish of me?

"Lord, give me wisdom, or, if love demand,  
Leave me in ignorance; it matters naught  
If mine be years of plenty, or beset  
With famine direful and with parching drought!  
Be darkness over all, or daylight clear,  
Dispatch me hither, keep me stationed here,  
Say what it is, Lord, Thou wilt have of me?"

With these lines may be compared a portion of that apostrophe to Our Lord which occurs in her "Autobiography": "*à nous seule est la faute, si nous n'arrivons pas en peu de temps à cette dignité sublime, à ce véritable amour, source de tous les biens. Nous mettons notre*

<sup>1</sup> "Minor Works" of S. Teresa, pages 4, 5. Translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook.

cœur à si haut prix ! Nous sommes si lents à faire à Dieu le don absolu de nous-mêmes ! nous sommes si loin de la préparation qu'il exige ! Or, Dieu ne veut pas que nous jouissions d'un bonheur si élevé, sans le payer d'un grand prix. La terre, je le sais, n'a pas de quoi l'acheter. Cependant, si nous faisons de généreux efforts pour nous détacher de toutes les créatures, pour tenir habituellement au ciel nos désirs et nos pensées ; si, à l'exemple de quelques saints, nous nous disposons pleinement et sans délai, j'en suis convaincue, Dieu en fort peu de temps nous accorderait un tel trésor."<sup>1</sup>

This translation of Père Bouix seems so happily to convey S. Teresa's precise meaning, that I will not risk a fresh translation into English. "Nous mettons notre cœur à si haut prix !" There is the whole point in a nutshell. It would be hard indeed to express it more poignantly.

Yet, so accustomed to comfort has the world grown that many people now seem unable to grasp the conception of pain accepted voluntarily. If they see anyone suffering it, their inference seems to be either that the person cannot help himself but certainly would if he could, or that, for some strange reason, he *likes* pain. S. Teresa neither "liked" it, speaking naturally, nor would she have escaped it if she could. Her famous motto, as we all know, was *aut pati aut mori*. But she did not choose that, nor live up to it so gallantly, because her natural

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," chapter xi.

woman "liked" suffering. She knew well what pain involved; but she also knew that, for Christians, it is inevitable. In one of her letters she writes: "If one day we are to reach the joy of Our Divine Crucified Lord, we must, as you know, carry the Cross after Him. However, it is not necessary, as Father Gregory pretends to ask God for sufferings: because He does not fail to send them to those whom He loves, or to lead them in the same path His Son trod."

This is by no means an isolated statement, for in the previous year she had written to her brother, Lorenzo de Cepeda, as follows: "It is a great stupidity, and little humility, to think of arriving at this degree without prayer, even with the virtues possessed by Francisco de Salcedo, or with those which God gives to yourself. Believe my words, and leave the matter to the Lord of the vineyard, Who knows well what everyone stands in need of. I never asked Him for interior trials, though He has given me many during my life, and these were very great. Our natural disposition and constitution contribute much to increase these afflictions."<sup>1</sup>

In that very beautiful treatise she wrote, "Conceptions of the Love of God," we find her warning her daughters against too great a love of peace, urging them to be watchful, to be on the alert for attack, and willing to endure with patience that which, necessarily in such a world as this, must come: "For the love of God,

<sup>1</sup> Letters of S. Teresa " (translated by the Rev. John Dalton) to her Brother, pages 175, 176.

watch yourselves very carefully. There must be war in this life, for we cannot sit with our hands folded among so many enemies, but must keep constant watch over both our inward and outward conduct."<sup>1</sup>

And yet once more, with just a flicker of that wit which she never could wholly exclude from solemn themes, she exclaims: "The Saints are in Heaven, this is certain; have we read of any who got there by living luxuriously on earth? Then how can we feel so easy about doing so? Who told us that it was right? How is it that some men squander their time uselessly in eating and sleeping well? I am amazed at it. One would suppose there was no future world, and that this was the safest way to live."<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere in the same treatise she seems almost to gauge and test spiritual progress by the presence and persistence of pain and sorrow: "When I see anyone, like some people I have met, always calm and never meeting with any conflict, although I do not witness her offend God, yet I always feel misgivings about her, and, since the devil leaves her alone, I try to prove her in every possible way, so that she may discover what she really is. I have rarely known such cases, yet it is possible for the soul which God has raised to a high degree of contemplation to be in such a state, and enjoy constant interior happiness. . . . I have weighed

<sup>1</sup> "Minor Works" of S. Teresa—Conceptions of the Love of God, section 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, section 18.

the matter carefully, and I do not envy such persons, for I find others advance more who sustain such combats that I have described, although their prayer is not such, in point of perfection, as we should expect it to be here.

I do not allude to those who have attained great holiness and mortification by their long years of warfare; they have died to the world, and Our Lord usually gives peace, which, however, does not prevent their perceiving and grieving deeply over their faults."<sup>1</sup> In one of the later chapters of her "Autobiography,"<sup>2</sup> these words occur: "Il me semble que souffrir est la seule raison de l'existence; et c'est ce que je demande à Dieu avec le plus d'ardeur. Je lui dis quelquefois du fond le mon âme: Seigneur, ou mourir ou souffrir! je ne vous demande pas autre chose. Lorsque j'entends sonner l'horloge, c'est pour moi un sujet de consolation, à la pensée que je touche d'un peu plus près au bonheur de voir Dieu, et que c'est une heure du moins à passer dans cette vie." Surely in these closing words there is a conviction of the immense value of suffering, coupled with a half-expressed avowal of wearied, strained, tense endurance. The same sense of the inevitableness, for those who would follow holiness, of pain is conveyed, this time with a halo of humour, in her letter to the Bishop of Osma: "One cannot be a learned man, nor a courtier,

<sup>1</sup> "Conceptions of the Love of God," sections 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter xl., page 530. Translation by Père Marcel Bouix.

without great expense and labour. Now to become a courtier of Heaven, and to possess spiritual knowledge, cannot be effected without spending some time, and enduring some affliction of spirit."<sup>1</sup>

If we turn to her poems—which, whether or no she were right in disclaiming the true poet's fire, were alight with her quick feeling, transfused with her perfect self-surrender—we find the same teaching. Even if we omit those whose authenticity, though not absolute, is almost certain, viz. "The Nuns of Carmel," and "The Processional for the Feast of the Holy Cross," which last is sung still by Carmelite nuns on the Feast, we can quote from the attested "Greeting to the Cross":

"Cross, thou delicious solace of my life,  
I welcome thee!  
O standard, 'neath whose sign the worst  
Of cowards must be brave."

Even in these days when unlimited individual "interpretation" is claimed as a right, no one, with the deliberate intention of avoiding suffering, could utter such words as these without being guilty of really rank hypocrisy. What S. Teresa meant by them is abundantly clear.

In one of the four poems which did or do bear her own autograph, we find these lines:

"With sorrow rife, our earthly life  
Could not more bitter be,  
Nor can life dwell within the soul,  
While kept apart from Thee.

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<sup>1</sup> "Letters of S. Teresa," page 67. Translated by the Rev. John Dalton.



"For he who dwells in this sad world  
In sorrow ever sighs,  
Since true life never can be found  
Except in Paradise."<sup>1</sup>

Under the title of the Gospel of Pain, Father George Tyrrell preached on the Feast of S. Teresa, in 1906, in the Carmelite Church in London, a sermon which is perhaps one of the most convincing discourses ever delivered on this most difficult subject.<sup>2</sup>

But not yet is the enumeration of her sufferings complete. To all this pain of body and mind was added for the Saint that other dolour which comes—surely so unnecessarily, so wastefully?—from the wanton hostility of some of our fellow creatures. There may, of course, be mortals who love fighting for its own sake—it seems an odd and unaccountable taste indeed—but if there be such they ought to be rather grateful than not to that malignant portion of the human race who devote what energies they have, and a seeming abundance of leisure, to making gratuitous troubles for their neighbours. Only those who whole-heartedly desire to do their own appointed congenial work in peace, and have, through long years, been subjected to unprovoked attack, to the perpetual creation of artificial and wholly unnecessary obstacles and difficulties by people who have little or no business at all in the matter, can have any real idea of the sharpness of the prolonged discomfort of

<sup>1</sup> "Minor Works" of S. Teresa, page 12.

<sup>2</sup> Printed in "Hard Sayings," pages 131 *et seq.*

such a state of things. It would not matter so much to a capable person without Christian principles; but the real irremovable sting to an ordinary Christian, *a fortiori* to a saintly woman like S. Teresa, lies in the almost irresistible temptation which such troubles bring to injure Christian charity. Let anyone try to do work which needs to be done, which he personally cares to do, try in the best way among a set of people who do their ingenious utmost either from stupidity, or malignity, or vanity, or more likely from a combination of these, to spoil and thwart his work perpetually, and he will need no one to tell him what the acuteness of the struggle is to feel really and truly charitable to such persons. This is just how S. Teresa was placed when she was toiling for the reform of the Carmelite Order, and she was entirely aware of the misery of the situation. She may not have dwelt upon it often—probably the needs of charity are best served by thinking as little as possible about such tangles—but in one of her letters a passage occurs which is singularly significant to any reader who has had a real if, compared to S. Teresa's, small experience of this particular kind of suffering :

“Indeed the stratagems and diligence which have been made use of to defame us, and especially Father Gracian and myself (I am the person against whom all their blows are directed) are so numerous, and the accusations against this good man have been so false, and the memorials which were presented against him

to the King, as well as against the reform of the convents, were so scandalous, that to have *seen* them your Lordship would have wondered how anyone could have invented such malice. But I am persuaded that we gained much by them, because the nuns felt as much joy as if these calumnies did relate to them. The virtue of Father Gracian has shone with such brightness under the trial that I am quite astonished. What a great treasure must not God have hidden in that soul, for he prays especially for those who calumniate him, and he bears their calumnies with as much joy as S. Jerome! He cannot, however, endure the false charges which our enemies have brought against the nuns.”<sup>1</sup>

This letter was addressed to the Archbishop of Evora in the year 1578. S. Teresa was therefore sixty-three, and was writing three years later than the date when she herself said she had worn the religious habit for forty years, sixteen years after she had finished the “Autobiography,” and only four years before her death. This frank admiration of Father Gracian’s charity, tacitly admitting the extreme difficulty of feeling truly charitable to deliberately malicious enemies, does not belong to the long weary years of struggle, but to the years of illumination, of saintliness. It may be compared with that “Epistle on Charity” which Richard Rolle wrote, perhaps one of the most wonderful expositions of this essential and difficult virtue ever

<sup>1</sup> “Letters of S. Teresa,” page 30. Translated by the Rev. John Dalton.

written, for, like the great chapter in the Corinthians, it makes no accommodations. Yet, for us ordinary mortals who strive in vain to reach, however utterly we admire, however entirely we admit the necessity of these self-emptied extremes of love, perhaps the admission of so great a saint as Teresa de Jesus comes with a still more encouraging comfort even than Rolle's, a comfort which is of genuine assistance in our struggles to get a little nearer to the ideal. If anyone will imagine that because S. Teresa recognised the difficulty of really loving, and hence really praying for our neighbours who may behave unneighbourly, she therefore did not do it herself, the following translated passage from the Bull of Gregory XV., for her canonisation, may correct such a supposition:

"She also imitated the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ for His enemies in a marvellous manner. Although violently persecuted and tried, she loved those who harmed her, and prayed for those who hated her. Indeed the slanders and injuries she endured nourished her love and charity, so that men of authority used to say that to win Teresa's love one must defraud or injure her."

In this connexion we should remember the contents of one of the eleven papers found after her death in her Breviary. Different people will feel the appeal of different members of the Hierarchy of Holiness: the richness of the Catholic heritage of Saints is one of the great vitalising consolations of the Church,

Among us mortals of so many races and of infinite variety of temperament and environment, S. Teresa must always appeal to those men and women who are essentially human, who feel difficulties really and constantly, who are quick-witted, who see all which is irresistibly funny quite as acutely as they feel everything which is intensely painful and trying. Probably most people keep in some one devotional book, all the papers which mean most to them; there is no reason to doubt that S. Teresa followed this ordinary plan. How significant then to those who love her and truly know her is the following, the longest of these eleven bookmarks:

“(8) *Advice as to how to profit by persecution.*—To ensure that persecutions and insults should bear good fruit and profit the soul, it is well to consider that they are done to God before they are done to me, for the blow aimed at me has already been aimed at His Majesty by sin. Besides, the true lover ought to have made the compact with the Bridegroom that she will be wholly His, and care nothing for self. If then our Spouse bears with this injury, why should not we bear with it? Our sorrow ought to be for the offence against His Majesty, as the wrong does not affect our soul, but only our body of clay, which so richly deserves to suffer.”<sup>1</sup>

What abiding comfort surely is to be found in the closing words. The greatest malignity can, it is true, hurt our “body of clay” almost in-

<sup>1</sup> “Minor Works” of S. Teresa, page 200. By the Benedictines of Stanbrook.

calculably ; but it lies with us, and with our faithful or faithless use of grace, whether or no it hurt our souls. That power has never been put into the hands of our foes. Our real foes, here as elsewhere, are those of our own household. When once that fact is grasped, malignity is at last shorn of its terrors.

Some of us, then, may find comfort in the " Epistle on Charity, and some in this script in a Breviary ; and all alike may thank GOD for His holy hermit, Richard, and His winning woman Saint, Teresa de Jesus.

It is absolutely unnecessary to elaborate further the details of S. Teresa's sufferings ; enough has been said to describe to those who yet have to make her acquaintance, to recall to those who have made it, the various kinds of pain she endured.

My last point remains—her attainment which was won through pain, her vision, her illumination.

It is outside the purpose of this book to attempt to undertake any minute description of the " stages " in mystical union. Its aim is a simpler, humbler, but in these days of hasty snatching-up of fanciful ideas, not less necessary one : it is just to argue that illumination is not a strange decoration of a few intellectual or spiritual cranks, but that while it is or can come to be a constant state of the great saints, it can also be the lot of poets, and that it can light every man coming into the world, on the condition that saint, poet, or common man will attain the state of purity, a state won by all alike,

though in differing degrees, by some amount of pain suffered, by some measure of deliberate self-surrender. There may be but little bearing of pain, but little self-denial; then the purity is stained and marred and partial, and the dimness but seldom broken in upon by light. There may be heroic acceptance of pain, a will given up entirely, and then, into the transparence of such a life, the light shines constantly.

Many of us need still to learn how in human life the dividing lines are not absolute; that unlike as we seem, not only in our natural endowments, our external circumstances, but in our own response, our own wilfulness or self-surrender, yet we are not shut away, the saint in one compartment, the sinner in another, with the miscalled "average man" wandering about loose somewhere between them; but, in this life at any rate, while our great opportunity still remains, "we are members one of another."

That S. Teresa saw visions is definitely stated in the Bull for her canonisation: "First among Teresa's virtues ranked the love of God. . . . Our Lord wonderfully increased it by a number of visions and revelations."<sup>1</sup>

In her "Autobiography," as early as the fourth chapter, S. Teresa tells us that after nine months Our Lord deigned to vouchsafe to her illumination, and, though rarely, even union; she adds naïvely that she was ignorant of their nature and value.

These graces were few, and at first fleeting.

<sup>1</sup> "Minor Works" of S. Teresa, page 258.

As the years went by, and her struggles to detach herself from every clogging fault, from every worldly inclination, were more persistent and more powerful, illumination grew stronger and more frequent.

She was one of the most unfortunate of the saints perhaps in her spiritual fathers, or rather, it is truer to say, that for many years that was so. She not seldom laments the loss she suffered through the lack of a competent director who would have had the experience to recognise the divine origin of her visions, who would not have troubled and distressed her by suggesting for them a diabolical genesis.

This is not the place to recount the gradual passage, as her whole nature became more and more purified through struggle and suffering, of the transient flickers of light into a steadier illumination, of the stages of vision and quiet and rapture into union. Indeed, since S. Teresa has left behind her the "Autobiography," "The Interior Castle," and "The Way of Perfection," no one has the smallest excuse for meddling in the matter, in the way of trying to tell it again. But since there may be people who wish to have some line of demarcation drawn between the earlier and later stages, it is perhaps well just to quote her account of union. It occurs in "The Interior Castle":<sup>1</sup> "The devil cannot interfere nor do any harm, for His Majesty is so joined and united with the essence of the soul that the evil one dare not approach, nor can he even

<sup>1</sup> "Fifth Mansions," chapter i.



understand this mystery. This is certain, for it is said that the devil does not know our thoughts, much less can he penetrate a secret so profound that God does not reveal it even to us. Oh, blessed state, in which this cursed one cannot injure us."

Perhaps that passage makes clear the distinction between illumination—which may shine on those who are still very far from even that degree of virtue which one day they will attain on earth, which gleams at whiles in the troubled scenes of our daily warfare—and that full union which a few of the greatest saints have experienced, a union untroubled, unassailable by the enemy of man.

Though it should not be necessary to say so, one had perhaps better not omit to say that this mystic union is, after all, an earthly state, a condition of our present human life. It is not, of course, beatific vision, the heavenly reward; it is not even the *humen gloriæ* of Catholic theologians. A reader who desires to pursue a little further this theme might consult such a book as the Abbot of Buckfast's "The Human Soul."<sup>1</sup> What it is of prime importance to realise is that here, as elsewhere in the eternal scheme of things, God, Who has done so much for us, still requires us to do something for ourselves. As Abbot Vonier says, that kind of sanctifying grace called *humen gloriæ*—i.e. the preparation of the human soul for the Beatific Vision—"is given to us and given to us more abundantly through the acts

<sup>1</sup> Chapters xli and xlii.

of Christian life done in the body of our mortality." Similarly the mystic wins to that union which is possible "in the body of our mortality," because he deliberately tries to purge himself of sins, of faults, of all that is meretricious and shameful and weak, that he may at last be ready for the gift. None of us will ever make much progress till we realise that preparation of ourselves for the reception of the greatest gifts is absolutely essential, and is our own bounden business and responsibility.

There is perhaps another distinction which should be made, that important one between genuine illumination and self-delusion. It can hardly be done better than in S. Teresa's own words. The later chapters of the "Autobiography" contain accounts of many of her visions and revelations; but at the beginning of the thirty-eighth chapter there occurs the following passage, very familiar of course to all students of her writings, wherein she draws clearly the above distinction, and attempts further, so far as the hampering limits of human speech will extend, to convey the difference between physical and supernatural light. She writes: "*Dans la suite il m'est arrivé, et il m'arrive encore quelquefois, que Notre Seigneur me découvre de plus grands secrets, mais de telle manière que je ne vois que ce qu'il lui plaît de me montrer, sans qu'il soit au pouvoir de mon âme, quand elle le voudrait, d'apercevoir rien de plus. Le moindre de ces secrets suffit pour ravir l'âme d'admiration, et la faire avancer beaucoup dans*

le mépris et la basse opinion des choses de la vie. Je voudrais pouvoir donner une idée de ce qui m'était alors découvert de moins élevé; mais en cherchant à y parvenir, je trouve que c'est impossible; car entre la seule lumière de ce divin séjour où tout est lumière, et la lumière d'ici-bas, il y a déjà tant de différence, qu'on ne peut les comparer, celle du soleil ne semblant plus que laideur. L'imagination la plus subtile ne peut arriver à se peindre et à se figurer cette lumière, ni à se représenter aucune des merveilles que Notre Seigneur me faisait alors connaître. Il est impossible de rendre le souverain plaisir qui accompagnait cette connaissance, et le haut degré de suavité dont tous mes sens étaient alors comblés; ainsi je suis forcée de n'en dire davantage."<sup>1</sup>

It has been stated all through these pages that the truth which it is eminently desirable to urge to-day is that the Mystic's way is not, and never has been, a way of wilful choice, of pleasant selection, of self-directed emotion. We can see—and if at all how better than by the life of S. Teresa? and yet we can by the life of every saint who was also a Mystic—that the necessary path to union with GOD after illumination begins while that illumination is waxing, with hardness and pain. Now, in this passage just quoted, we can perceive the same truth from another angle, can realise how far the will is from being able to pick and choose as it pleases. "I only saw

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," chapter xxxviii.

what He was pleased to show me, without my soul having any power, even when she wished it, to perceive anything beyond." Surely that definite experience of so great and so accurate a Saint should for ever divide maudlin day-dreams from real illumination. One more passage from her writings may possibly clinch this particular point: "Je reviens maintenant aux artifices du démon et aux douceurs qu'il procure, et je dis que le moyen sur de les éviter, c'est d'avoir dès le début de la vie spirituelle, une énergique résolution d'aller toujours par le chemin de la croix, sans désirer les consolations intérieures."<sup>1</sup>

If that be still insufficient, the reader may turn back a page or two and find the passage where she recommends those who aim at mystical union "de commencer par se détacher de toute espèce de contentement, et d'entrer dans le carrière avec une seule résolution, celle d'aider Jésus-Christ à porter sa croix." There is the gateway to vision and union in that image so dear to her—"one only resolution, to help JESUS Christ to carry His Cross."

It may be well to close with a rather different example, a somewhat subtle one, of one actual way whereby pain wrought the illumination. After suffering considerably from not a few maladroit directors, she tells us<sup>2</sup> that, at last, the Rector of the Jesuit College gave her as director a Confessor profoundly versed in spiritual things. Yet even now all was not to be

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," chapter xv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter xxxiii.

plain sailing, for though Father Gaspard de Salazar would fain have encouraged her to great advances in illumination, he, like all his brethren in the Company of Jesus, could not go beyond the wishes of their Superior. Consequently, some steps which otherwise he would have recommended, he thought it wiser not to propose. S. Teresa, with the humility which had become habitual, writes: "D'un autre côté, mon âme se sentait comme emporté par l'impétuosité de ses transports; je souffrais beaucoup de la voir ainsi liée par mon confesseur; cependant je ne m'écarterais en rien de ce qu'il commandait."

What an object lesson for those whose idea of spiritual progress is bound up with the exercise of their own independent judgment. Any person of ordinary sensitiveness and perception can realise the additional acuteness of this fresh trouble. A Confessor who did not understand was, some might think, a sufficient trial; but how great the temptation must have been to petulant impatience when another Confessor did, at length, understand, but was hampered, possibly not by the fact that his superior would refuse, but simply because he could not then and there obtain either permission or refusal.

A whole flood of excellent arguments rushes in; common sense, of which sometimes we hear so much, flies to the rescue. That is to say, with the ordinary many that is what would occur. But S. Teresa was of the few who realise

the grace and power and efficacy which are in "holy obedience." Because she was willing to bow to that which may have seemed like a very earthly authority, an authority faulty to foolishness the self-satisfied dogmatist might assure us, therefore after many days the reward came, and she could say with S. Paul, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

Some may wonder why this imperfect and inadequate recital has, so far, taken no account of that work of S. Teresa which would offer by far the most easily collected and by far the most cogent witness to the theory that suffering is the pre-essential to that illumination which will one day be exchanged for the Beatific Vision. I mean, of course, "The Interior Castle." The reason is not one nor simple.

First of all, there is the convincing force which arises from the treatment of a subject when it is not the writer's first and principal aim. When a man or woman sits down deliberately to treat a subject, it is almost certain that that treatment will differ from the kind of handling it receives when it comes in as a very important but still subsidiary matter to the business directly in hand. Both manners have their value; both should be studied by all who would grasp the whole meaning. Thus far, S. Teresa's other works have been laid under careful contribution. Nothing from them will, I believe, clash with anything in "The Interior Castle," where the theme is, as it were, raised to a higher plane, reaching up and up into rare heights till it

trembles on the confines of those things "which it is not lawful for a măn to utter."

Then some reader may ask why, even if that be so, should we not supplement the collected passages from so many other sources with some from this supreme one? Just because—and this is a second element in the complex reason—it is supreme, and because it deals with the matter straight on; just because S. Teresa has told us—S. Teresa, the woman who suffered, who saw, who attained—just because of all that, it were worse than unnecessary for anyone to pick and choose, to fall to the vulgarity of acting as showman among heavenly things, here where she has done all.

And thirdly this is, in aim, a study not of union but of illumination. Purgation and union, the one the pre-essential, the other the crown, cannot be left out; but illumination was the chosen business of this book.

To create an interest where perhaps it did not exist, to pave the way by extracts, to indicate the exact place where the full conclusion may be found, that much, I hope, a lover of S. Teresa may lawfully attempt. To tell again what she has told once for all, no!

"The Interior Castle" has been translated<sup>1</sup> admirably into English. The volume is at anyone's service; nor can anyone really need a commentary upon it. A perusal of it will drive

<sup>1</sup> By the Benedictines of Stanbrook. Revised by the Very Reverend Benedict Zimmermann, O.C.D. Published by Thomas Baker, 6s. net.

home the thesis which this book has attempted to present, and the preliminary foundations of which it has attempted to lay; in doing which it prefers no claim to originality, and apologises for no loans. Its single object, in a materialistic age over prone to rely on the five senses eked out with emotional speculation, was to call some who might respond away from mysticism, falsely so-called, to a contemplation of a few poets, and then to that of this mighty soul, whose holy and magnificent visions can never be squared with the newest and most fashionable psychology, whose great heart out-throbbled the puny bounds set by birth, worldly position, wealth or fame, and whose delightful wit would have given short shrift to the pompous pretensions of some modern science, which will condemn dogma with tremendous dogmatism, sweep away what it calls superstition by an arrogance which out-superstitions superstition, which will weigh Heaven and earth in a human balance, and presume to bound Infinity by the sorry limits of a finite understanding.

So, we may close with one single passage from "The Interior Castle," one which sums up all which has been quoted, and which must remain a standing challenge to that modern spirit which fancies that the essence of virtue lies in "holding up one's head like a man": if only we had anything to do it about! S. Teresa asks:

"Do you know what it is to be truly spiritual? It is for men to make themselves the *slaves* of



God—branded with His mark which is the Cross. . . . Unless you make up your minds to this, never expect to make much progress, for humility, as I said, is the foundation of the whole building.”

It seems to some of us, as we look on nowadays, that the one vital need is that the world should get back to the elemental realities of life and faith. Men’s views seem now so often just one mass of shallow borrowing, or emptiest makeshift. Nothing much, so it seems sometimes, matters but being found out : everything is all right if you can just scramble up to the low dull standard of the world’s external respectability. Of some men’s sins other than these, sinned shamelessly and perhaps grossly, we must of course say “it should not have been, it is all wrong.” And yet as we consider those whom the world casts out as rank failures, the wrecks of all kinds of intemperance, of wasting poverty and idleness, we surely turn back more at ease from these unashamed wastrels than from the smooth mole-like sinners, to the lives and doings of the Saints. Great as the space is, it is not unbridgeable. As we turn and contemplate the Saints’ transparent whiteness, their infinite toilsome struggles, their humble self-surrender, it is not only these which carry conviction, but it is also their lucid reality ; and that is why, in the light of their lives, coarse sins seem less hopeless than polished humbug.

Better still, we turn to the Gospels, and we remember that none of the sinners, not

Zacchæus, not Lazarus the beggar, not S. Mary Magdalene, and not even the rich young man, drew from Our Lord those scorching words which this accommodating age would have shuddered to hear Him launch at the Pharisees. His most burning denunciations were kept for the smooth hypocrites. We all know it. And it is a terrifying reflection, since hypocrisy is superlatively easy and insidious. Here it is where the Mystics bring us comfort, for surely it is incompatible with the Mystic Way. Men may counterfeit that life, but only for a time; it is too exacting, they are soon exposed and found out. Pain is a searching test, it divides the joints and marrow; no man has ever seen or attained unless pain was first and long his close companion.

So "the Way" is still there, that straight and narrow path winding finely through this world's wide spaces, hedged by thorns, paved with sharp cutting stones, lit by a heavenly light, the only possible way to the one supreme goal.

The conclusion of the matter, the theory, if one can call it by so academic a term, of illumination is simple enough, as simple indeed as its attainment is utterly hard. It is the "pure in heart" (the will having more influence than understanding has on the heart) who "see God"; and pain is the great purifier. Along the way of purgation, of entire self-surrender at whatever cost, the sin-stained mortal passes, first to purity, and then to vision.



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